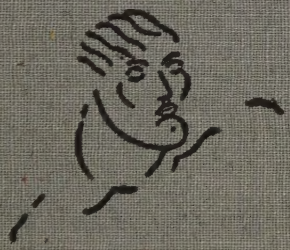

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NOT ON THE SCREEN

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1878

NOT ON THE SCREEN

BY HENRY B. FULLER

GARDENS OF THIS WORLD
NOT ON THE SCREEN

A COMPLETE LIST OF MR. FULLER'S WORKS
WILL BE FOUND AT THE END OF THIS VOLUME

HENRY B. FULLER

NOT ON THE SCREEN

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NOT ON THE SCREEN

I

The City Calls

The large crowded hall was dark and silent: dark, save where a shaft of light fell on the fancifully-clad leader of the orchestra and on certain tawdry manifestations of gilding and drapery; silent, save for the rustle of occasional departures—the retreat of those who were leaving the situation they had found on entering, two hours before. And there were a few faint, infrequent giggles and snickers from out-of-place spectators who felt themselves superior; but for the most part the crowd sat too absorbed for speech or for restlessness. Vital forces were at play and the outcome was in doubt—or, by a pleasant convention, was held to be so.

The subject-matter presented on the screen was this:

Two young people of ordinary quality, yet extraordinarily well-dressed, were in love and perhaps on the point of becoming engaged. When they met in the girl's home, one observed an

interior of notable size and of more than lavish furnishings. Among these was the girl's mother, a person—or personage—of high-powered physique who wore her grey hair proudly and carried her silks and laces with prodigious effect. The young man, alone in the world and alone in the cast, presented himself in the detached state of a youth who was a *jeune premier* and nothing more: no relatives, no friends, no associates. The feelings of the pseudo-stately mother were against him; her sympathies were with an older man who was in "business"—just what business never came to be elucidated. He had an "office" even larger and grander than some of the "drawing-rooms" in which he sometimes spent an evening; and "papers," vague in their nature, were frequently handled and signed. If he could but sign the right papers and look with sufficient favour on the young girl, her mother's "fortune" would be saved. Otherwise, mother and daughter (who had no other human aids in this desolate world) would have to leave their "mansion" and pass the rest of their days in humbler quarters: there would be no large motor-car awaiting their lightest call just outside the grand grilled entrance, and no more evenings spent in luxurious, if disorderly, night

clubs. Life, so full at the present moment, would become a blank.

But the attentions of the man of business (who could sign a check for any amount at any time) were rather fatally engaged by an emphatic lady of thirty or so (older and more experienced than the puzzled, helpless *ingénue*), who had no relations beyond those extended by the man of business; and even such relations as she had were involved in a pleasing penumbra of uncertainty: the spectator might determine them as he liked. The proper might think them proper, or vice versa. The improper might consider them improper, or just the other way about. Most of the spectators, who probably lay midway between propriety and impropriety, were at liberty to blink the entire matter, and many of them comfortably did so.

The great scene drew near. The young girl seemed trapped. The majestic mother—much more of a lady than most ladies ever try to be—was at her despairing wits' ends. The *jeune premier* was feeble. The adventuress was triumphing. The officers of the law were waiting at one side to clap the handcuffs upon the unheroic young hero at the behest of the business-like villain . . .

"Well," said Embert Howell, seeming to reach under his seat for his hat, "this is about where we came in, isn't it? Are you ready to go?"

"Quite so," the girl at his side declared, with promptitude. "Quite so," she repeated, with conviction.

In the lobby Howell said: "They might have worn simpler clothes and have lived in smaller rooms with quieter furniture, and have had a less exciting way of spending their evenings . . ."

The girl laughed. "Yes, they might have shown more mentality and better manners; and their grand affair might possibly have been raised to a higher plane. But the screen is the screen. . . . Is that our 'bus?"

The city calls, with its towers, its traffic, its tumult; its hopes, its excitements, its opportunities. There are those who would be glad to give them all up, who have had their fill of each; but these are the old. Youth, from the far edge, or beyond it, sees the great light and longs for a place in it. The sun's beams, however bright, cannot illumine worthily any worth-while deed when transacted on a small, dull stage. Our family circle is commonplace; town friends do not inspire. We

move, then, toward success, and we hope that, successful, we may return—for a day. Ahead, then, before ambition is stifled and before we become but a small cog among the slow-grinding wheels of minor routine. Fifty miles, or a hundred, will make all the difference between obscurity and any possible brilliancy. Let us, when we feel the impulse strong, make the shift.

It was on this basis that Embert Howell exchanged his thousands for his millions, and hoped, among the towers and the tumult, to make himself visible to these new millions and perceptible to the careless thousands he had left behind. The millions were slow to see, and the thousands would postpone acceptance until proof arrived. Meanwhile, a small, uncelebrating world of office, hotel-lobby, church, and hoped-for club—a life of minor commitments and tenuous relationships.

Office, going by the clock, yielded nothing before hours and nothing after hours, and little by way of companionship between. Church was a habit; one warmed one's hands at too low a fire. Hotel, with an infinitesimal cubicle aloft and a large colonnaded lobby below, was not unlike a considerable club (until a real club should come), with plenty of members and plenty of general

indifference. So many men who talked merely in pairs, low-voiced over business, perhaps. So many idle women who sat alone in the electric glare and often talked not at all. A feast of empty dishes; except when two or three women in a knot did talk shrilly, with laughter; and then the dishes seemed overloaded beyond all need, and one longed for some commanding waiter to remove them. But no waiter appeared; even toward midnight the airy banquet would be going on.

Mere smoke, mere vapour, for a young man of twenty-three. One consolation, however, was that when this new community treated him at all, it treated him in accordance with his age. A little more than his age, perhaps, by the friendly and well-disposed; a little less by the disparaging and the scornful. At home he had never been able to be more than eighteen. In that quarter expectation was slight—he should never come to much in the eyes of elders who had known him from five. The only course was to leave them and try elsewhere—to enter some community that had not known his infancy and all the ineptitudes that had followed along until his majority, and perhaps even beyond.

He had left behind him eighty miles, and eighty

years. Eighty only. Before that time, nothing whatever in the home town. No town, even—only an emptiness. Then, a rawness. Then, a promise. And then a lapse into the negligible. No; he must leave that reedy, eventless pond for the whirlpool. Better dizziness than stagnation.

Dizziness promptly ensued, for a time. Nor was the rawness abolished; it sprawled on an infinitely larger scale, to the accompaniment of an infinitely fluctuating raggedness. "I am a metropolis!" cried the city; and daily stood on tiptoe to become one.

Howell was a graduate of a university, as the institution chose to call itself. It had given him a course in economics, a course in advertising, and a course in one or two of the modern languages. As for the languages, his knowledge, purely theoretical, would have been useless in Paris or Vienna. Advertising might go better; he was not long in realizing that the least of its features was any knowledge of the wares it praised. With the selling of bonds (his first real urban foothold), the rule was not greatly different. There were the bonds themselves; there were the circulars; and there was the "house" behind both. No need to be conversant with the valuations of real property,

ground and building; no need to be greatly versed in the ways of public utilities. As has been said, there was the house itself. If a more intimate knowledge came to him later, as was likely enough, well and good.

His early successes, and some of his failures, were reported back to the home circle. The first were slightly magnified; the second were slightly minimized. The former, more frequent, and becoming more frequent still, were gratifying to a mother who received the situation in only the vaguest terms; surprising to a father who, bound by a status completely prosaic and limited, wondered that his boy could do so well; and exasperating to a restless younger brother, who was inclined to think that, with like opportunities, he might do even better.

Howell, then, able to appear acceptably dressed at the office, at church, and in his hotel lobby, is thus provided with a habitat, an occupation, and a domestic circle—rarities in the pictured world; but he hardly ventured, as yet, on excursions into the expensive world of the footlights, nor could he afford cab-fare save for the most exceptional occasions. A motor-car of his own remained a distant dream. Strange, how many inferior folk

swarmed the streets in dreams fully realized! Stranger, the incidences of Fortune.

But let these late reflections of his pass. The favours of Fortune, and their erratic bestowal, have puzzled older heads, and have tired some of them out. Twenty-three wonders, with some impatience and acerbity. Sixty-three, after long-continued opportunites for discipline and reconciliation, asks, now and then, whether Fortune's favours are necessary to a happy and successful life. Indeed, an occasional bold and unconventional spirit, exercised in living, has been known to declare that most of his discomforts and vexations have come through what he has had rather than from what he has had not. Property brings its cares; and relatives, whether by blood or marriage, are not invariably a solace and an aid.

But such considerations are as *nil* to a youth who has come to town to make his fortune. After all, action is the great desideratum. The blood, whether that of the individual or that of the community, must move. The pool, if it is to escape stagnation, must be stirred, whether by an angel or by a devil. Much of the time both seem to be at work, each with an active spoon in the broth. Every large city is to be regarded as a highly

maculated complex. The larger and more varied, the more certain is the presentation of the elements from which a satisfying private life may be compounded. The real calamity is the large city which is only a large town, and which gives, over-sufficiently, the elements of the one, while withholding, through very absence, the elements of the other. Poverty on a grand scale. Destitution in the midst of a seeming plenty. Yet many, many hungry sheep are fed, or think so.

Howell felt fed, with the others. At least, there was much to glean. Though the best seemed to be displayed, inaccessibly, behind thick plate-glass windows, so to speak, the second best, and the third, were within the reach of enjoyment. After all, the appetite of youth is insistent rather than fastidious; if the substantials come, the delicacies may delay. Given knife, fork and plate, an excess of crystal and napery may be held superfluous. If a dawning acquisitiveness looked ahead to rivalry with those farther along the road, the thing came as a prod, not as a pain.

II

A Youth is Canvassed

It would be idle to present Evelyn Trent as a beautiful young girl who dressed beautifully and did as she was directed, with no preferences of her own and no responsibility for her actions. It may be granted that she was beautiful, since beauty, now almost a sine qua non, is easily conferred. It may be conceded, further, that—on occasion—she could dress beautifully, though she did not always desire to, and could express her wilful desire in terms almost drastic. The glass of fashion tires, and she often tired herself by looking into it. There were even hours when she put on sport clothes that were far from new or neat and sought wilds conveniently near by. Nor is it necessary, now, to state that she always did as she was directed; otherwise, her mother, her chief directrice, would have troubled less about complexion and costume. Evelyn, lately twenty-one, felt herself an adult on all points and tended to develop a will of her own.

She had been sent to a good school—a "finishing-school," as it was called. On the whole, however, she preferred not to be accepted as "finished," but to go on finishing herself. This would take time and a variety of small touches, but she felt able to apply them. The school had come at a time of diminishing income, after her father's death; but it was held, in the deciding quarter, that an expenditure a little beyond the strict considerations of income would justify itself in the end. Expense, then; not lavish, but enough to keep our daughter in countenance before other daughters, for whom money was a lesser matter. Future social security was attained by the sacrifice of an occasional security from the deposit vaults—five hundred, or even a thousand.

The Trents, mother and daughter, lived in a house. This added to their dignity, they thought. The house, left behind in a neighbourhood that had had its day, could charm no purchaser as a residence, and was not quite placed for business, even of the choicer and less clamorous kind. No bank-note company, with plans for a new edifice, was likely to appear; nor would any educational firm receive professors in the double parlours. There were times when the family felt slightly be-

numbed amidst the cumbersome old walnut woodwork and the sprawly, worn French chairs of the 'nineties. Nothing further from the light, lavish luxuriousness which, on many screens, so befuddles the exacting yet ill-instructed taste of today.

Catherine Trent could play the grande dame on occasion, and was a semi-grande dame on most others. She was able to ignore the early struggles of a past now well closed and had long taken the state of wealth for granted. Too long, perhaps. It was easy for her to wonder at poverty and at bad dressing; while destitution, even of the passing sort known as "temporary embarrassment," always remained a puzzle and an annoyance. A little forethought, a little contriving, and tiresome demands need not be made. She shopped where she was known, and she lunched where she was known; and she gave such matters no further thought until others bethought themselves and presented their just claims. Bankers, among whom she had some friends, were always ready with good-natured, incidental advice, but did not let her affairs, relatively minor, distract their attention from concerns considerably larger.

The name of Catherine M. Trent—or of Mrs.

William P. Trent—was now and again in print; then she would show as a chairman among ladies (vaguely philanthropic) of her own general set, or would be a patroness of some large ball. Some of these ladies were newer than she, and richer. They crowded in, but they still acknowledged, indirectly, a priority. Mrs. Trent took this priority for granted, but would have resented any disposition to withhold acknowledgment of it.

Most of all, if one of these meetings happened to be held in her laborious old house, at the top of her laborious old steps, amidst her laborious old belongings. It was then that ladies who were accustomed to a lighter and more modern mode sighed or grimaced and wondered how long she would delay her departure.

There had been laboriousness, through many years, for her husband, before the house, a triumphal monument to an early fortune, had been consummated; laboriousness, too, for an architect who had earned his fee by doing hard things in the hardest way. He had tried to express the importance of his clients and to meet the demonstrations made by their active neighbours. The house, in its own day at least, had been considered "impressive." Even now, in its megatherium-like mass, it

was not to be disregarded—save that taxes tended to rise.

There is no further need to dwell on that coupling of pride and habit which keeps so many outmoded vehicles in their place on the track. A momentum communicated of old is good for a certain length of time. If the conveyance presently sags, and finally draws up rather helplessly to the kerb, that is a common phenomenon and need not surprise.

If Catherine Trent was a great lady (whether declining or no), there must, of course, have been lesser ones. If she received—and even exacted—homage, there must have been those to render it. And if any of her vassals ever had to confess a disadvantage in dealing with this rough world it was the part of their chatelaine to set things right. The castle stood sturdy and seemed in no measure denuded, and at times a suppliant would appear for alms.

The chief of these was Anastasia McIntyre, a widow, who was reluctant to resign the pleasures and graces to which she had become habituated and who could not quite contrive to meet both her luxuries and her necessities. The chief of the former—and, to do her justice, one of the least

expensive—was tea, now and then, at the right place and among the important people. She knew them all by sight; often name by name; and not infrequently she was on speaking terms with them. Few of them quite cared for her and her fusty, frumpy ways, but they did not disdain and they did not discountenance. "She is out of the cellar of the past," some young person might say. "And not a very choice vintage, either," another would rejoin.

Well, Anastasia McIntyre had her favourite hotel and her favourite restaurant in it. At certain times of day they called it a tea-room. There was stucco and gilding a-plenty for chops and rissoles and their proper vegetables, but perhaps too much of it all for the simple ceremonial of tea. A Japanese screen or two would have ameliorated those excessive, those determined, those heartlessly insistent decorations. But no screen was brought, and those who liked pomp for a light occasion could easily have it. The place was familiar; the waiters (unless new and airish) were indulgent and did not fail noticeably in respect; the company was commonly good; and she knew when pairs and parties were congruously composed. It was an exception to this last arrangement

—or rule, perhaps—that she now reported to her hostess.

"I never saw him before. And I'm sure he had never seen the place before. And I'm sure she hadn't seen him before—at least, not many times. He was almost as much a novelty to her as the room was to him. He took in the place, and she took in the man. He stared at all those cupids and flourishes, and she looked at his hands and tie; and at his eyes, more than was necessary . . ."

"Well," said Catherine Trent, impartially, if not impassively, "a girl can't powder merely for herself; she must consider, to some extent, the person she is powdering for." This mother, not greatly concerned, was simply lying back for more.

"I didn't say she was powdering," declared Anastasia. "She was behaving herself. But the way they *do* powder, everywhere! I've seen them at it even in the front of the gallery at our church. I expect to see it at the next funeral. If it happens at mine, I shall try to rise and stop it. . . ."

"How did he seem? Evelyn has discrimination."

"Why, all well enough. A simple fellow, but nothing against him. New, of course; nothing assured in his manner. And I didn't *know* him. I couldn't place him . . ."

Catherine Trent smiled at her friend's claim to omniscience. This was a gift to be asserted less frequently nowadays than in an earlier, simpler past; nor was it hardly to be deployed in a great modern hotel. Besides, she felt sure that her Evelyn would be the last to be associating with a mere stray—and least of all in a place of general resort. "He is probably all right enough," she decided. "But," she added, "is he all right for her?"

III

The Other Man

Embert Howell's tea recorded an advance upon his cinema. Though the *décor* could not have been more gorgeous, the company was choicer. In particular, a group of three or four ladies with low-heeled black shoes impressed him. Their manners were as quiet as their footgear. He felt sure that they were people of consequence, and that they had just come from some scene of consequence; perhaps from some symphony concert where they were box-holders, and of which organization they might be valued supporters. They quite quenched some flashy creatures near by: the snuffers applied unconsciously and the garish lights put out. He was glad that he could appreciate the difference. The ladies of his admiration paid without a murmur—as he also was presently obliged to do, despite what he considered an excessive charge; and one of them bowed—or nodded—to Evelyn as her party passed out. "We belong, then," thought Embert, and felt greatly comforted.

Such hole-and-corner communions could not, of course, go on indefinitely. A meeting at church was something, doubtless; but a call at the house would count for considerably more. It was thus that, upon a certain afternoon, on the occasion of one of our multiplying holidays, Catherine Trent had the opportunity of seeing Embert Howell in her own front parlour.

He was not slow in acknowledging a country origin, but she saw nothing of the plough-boy. In fact, she saw little to remark at all. He was like dozens of other young men she had met. A height above the average; slight to correspond; brown hair; light about the chest and shoulders; feet that were prejudiced by the wide shoes of current fashion; hands that were narrow enough, yet not too carefully looked after; a face that commanded a ready cheerfulness—which, she of course decided, was the outcome of innocence rather than of worldly experience. "A good boy," she determined; "but nothing remarkable." Evelyn herself, she was glad to observe, received her caller without *empressement:* just one young man the more.

Embert felt her grey hair and her voluminous floating draperies, during the few moments that

she was present. He felt equally the massive old walnut woodwork and the cumbersome, over-upholstered chair in which he had been seated. The picture-palace was of to-day, and the hotel-restaurant of yesterday; but this big, heavy, dismal drawing-room came to him as from past ages. Home, eighty miles away, seemed flimsy as a structure and insignificant as to its contents. A new porch had only added tinder to tinder; and the recent dining-room set, selected from a catalogue, surely looked, impeccably varnished, its young years.

Mrs. Trent's presence, as has been said, was brief. Other concerns, and another visitor, called her. "Oh, it's Mr. Sherrill," said Evelyn, as a vigorous, confident young man in the later thirties passed through the hall to an adjoining room. Embert saw him, too, and was ready to acknowledge himself the inferior in athletic robustness, self-confidence, and worldly experience. "Well, it all comes," he thought, as he turned in his chair.

The new arrival had bowed slightly and smilingly to Evelyn, on passing the door. "I suppose I am to see you again, very soon," his expression implied. Embert found himself wondering how a mere passing salutation could convey at once so

little and so much. As for himself, when he bowed, he bowed; without adumbrations, without implications, without presumptions. How well were the two acquainted? And would this newcomer, after whatever concern with the mother, burst in upon the daughter and wipe him from the scene?

He felt that it would not be difficult for this other man to brush him away, to cancel him, to obliterate him. Better to fade out silently, with appearances decently preserved, than to oppose an ineffective boyish bravado. Why be overassertive, if one is to fail, after all? He must wait. Time would instruct him, season him, strengthen his temper. At thirty, or even at twenty-eight, he should step out, he should assert his quality; except with the most experienced grey-heads, he should not hesitate to stand forth as a competent man of the world—the world of business and the world of society.

Meanwhile, the young woman upon whom he had undertaken to bestow (with some encouragement) a half hour of his time, along with a corresponding involvement of her own, was staring at him in question and casting an occasional glance toward the other room. Her situation appeared to be this: there was, for the moment, little hope

for a word from the man near by; and there was probably no great desire for a word from the man at a remove, who seemed, just at present, to be sufficiently occupied with her mother. A brief period, then, that went for nothing.

The table in the other room had come to be covered with documents. Catherine Trent was not too grand to go to an office, but felt grander if the office came to her. Especially if the envoy from the office called himself a banker. Sherrill so called himself—though mortgage-broker might have been an exacter title; and so his client took him, easily accepting name for reality. Besides, he was a young man in society: she had met him here and there on one occasion or another. She knew, of course, that society is often used to push business—that a man, for example, may pay for an opera-box less from social ambition than from a desire for furtherance in the business world. She had seen Sherrill in one of these boxes now and again; she accepted him for a banker (if there be any hierarchic glory in that); and she was pleased to have him in her library, as she sometimes called it, shuffling papers with his firm, well-kept hands.

Presently the shuffling ended, and Mrs. Trent and Sherrill came into the room where silence, or

semi-silence, had lately prevailed. Conversation was immediately resumed. Sherrill, who had never quite laid aside the air of society for the air of business, now became social altogether. Words and actions a-plenty for the place and the time. He made little or nothing of Howell, whose unimportance he at once perceived, and addressed himself, with a sort of rich gallantry, directly to Evelyn. A lesson in the ways of the world for poor Embert Howell, reduced at once to the level both of learner and of spectator. Evelyn's mother gave him a few charitable words, but they were cold, as charity often is. It was not long before he said, in the well-worn formula that he "must go"; and go he did, leaving Sherrill side by side with Evelyn on a shabby brocaded sofa and a mother in obvious approval of the arrangement. He might have noted, if possessed of finer perceptions, that the arrangement was not so completely agreeable to Evelyn herself.

Sherrill did not outstay his time. He understood the nature of his call and knew how not to linger too long. He made equal adieux to both women—or so it seemed to the elder. To the younger it seemed as if, at that last moment, he had looked too intently and had held her hand both a little

too long and a little too firmly. His handshake for Mrs. Trent had been, according to Mrs. Trent herself, quite perfect.

"Really, a most presentable and capable young man," she declared, the house once clear.

"Oh yes, indeed!" agreed Evelyn roundly, without hesitation.

"So different from . . ." She shrugged. Her shrug propelled Howell a street or two farther on his way.

"Oh yes, indeed!" agreed Evelyn roundly, without hesitation.

"Never waste time," observed—or counselled—her mother, putting one of the "tidies" back in place.

"Oh no, indeed!" declared Evelyn, still roundly, and still without hesitation.

"Let us have a proper regard"—here her mother gave a half-glance toward the distant library-table, though her thoughts were where her daughter stood—"a proper regard for our own interests." Her "us" was hortatory, and was addressed to a single individual.

"Oh yes, indeed!" replied Evelyn, in hearty acquiescence.

In the study of her own interests she went up

to her own bedroom, where she began to rearrange the various objects on her dressing-table, without once looking, however, into her mirror. Brushes, combs, bottles, puff, hand-glass—all were shifted hither and yon while Evelyn thought the last hour over. Really, you know, we have our likes and our dislikes. They are often irrational and sometimes disadvantageous; still, we have them. There is A, who is imperfect, yet we want him by. There is B, who seems perfection itself, yet we wish him away. There is C, the finished article, who will never perform beyond his present; and there is D, the rather ragged, who can perhaps be bettered to one's utter taste and go on for miles—and carry you along with him. "Good stuff," said Evelyn under her breath, with no thought of slang or of vulgarity, as she moved a nail-file from right to left and arranged a bottle of lotion according to its label. Then she threw a showy pink enamelled powder-puff into her waste-basket; for it looked, all of a sudden, too worldly, too sophisticated, almost—how shall it be said?—too corrupt.

IV

On the Edge of the Pool

Every properly constructed entertainment, in these days, must have its hero, its heroine, its villain, its *mère noble* (if a *père noble* fails), its orgy, and its bathing-party. Our orgy, if it comes at all, will come later; but the bathing-party, pool and all, is more readily managed and comes just here.

Evelyn Trent had never written a line of verse, and was not likely to, whatever stress love might lay upon her. But her mother, among her other free expenditures, gave a significant sum, annually, to the support of a magazine of poetry. Catherine Trent commonly disliked the poetry, and even abhorred some of it, but her name continued to appear, semi-annually, in the desirable list of supporters. Evelyn knew the editor of the publication and some of the guarantors, and even some of the contributors. Sometimes guarantor and contributor would be one, implying both social prominence and a slant toward the better things.

What more natural than that, among these guarantors (and contributors) there should be at least one friendly lady who had an estate in one of the most favoured suburbs and a disposition to give young talent a day of pleasure? Large grounds, well shaded. A commodious pool. Why not, then, offer to some of these obscure and struggling young people a special Sunday?—an hour or two in the water, an hour at lunch, and an hour or more of recuperation and general sociability on a wide veranda before they left for the train.

It must be made clear that these young people were selected for their talent, not for their physical comeliness. Few of them could have been confounded with bathing beauties or with life guards. Some of the young women were over-plump, and the water had its own wilful way with their short hair. Some of the young men were flat-chested and scrawny, and would have faced a physical instructor with reluctance. But they were happy, even the least prepossessing of them, in the sunny day, the hedges of lilacs, the tepid water, and the general air of kindly hospitality that enveloped them. If we are young enough to be right, we are young enough to feel right. Self-criticism,

in the matter of physique, is one of the most precious gifts that kind Nature has withheld. If we saw ourselves as others see us, what a mass of misery the usual bathing-beach would be!

"Come out, if you care to," the mistress of the domain had panted to Evelyn, during one of her pauses in her continuing course round the running-track of her club. "There will be only about a dozen of them, and you may bring one more, if you like. This is only for good weather, you understand."

"Thanks," said Evelyn, admiring the other's perseverance. She herself seldom went beyond the pulley-weights, and she wore all the clothes she could.

"There will be suits," said the other, starting off in next-to-nothingness on her tenth or twelfth lap.

"Not for me, thanks. I'll see it all from the edge."

When Evelyn appeared at the scene of action, she had Embert Howell in her company. She had telephoned him that the day was too fine to spend in town. In her company, yes. Society, for the unaccustomed, is best taken in easy doses—in capsules that occasion no alarm and arouse no

distrust. Evelyn knew that, on a pleasant Sunday, people of consequence from near-by estates were more than likely to saunter in; and they might be happily met under informal conditions. An introduction in such circumstances, while picturesque and peculiar, was an introduction all the same, and would carry as much weight as another, if one but took the trouble to see that it was kept in mind. And she hoped that Embert Howell would distinguish himself by keeping out of the water.

He did so. A bathing-suit was offered, and declined. Evelyn would not say that any line had been drawn, yet both host and hostess, after some minor attentions, kept to the veranda; and if there was a line, Embert was on the better side of it. Let those youthful geniuses frolic as they pleased. There was a clever, shaggy young Jew who dived and splashed incessantly; and there was a dear little girl from Bohemia, who had a sort of "v" over one letter of her name and who had actually had a poem printed—eight lines, two stanzas. She dived with difficulty, having been developed to float; and her surface manœuvres alternated interestingly with the deep-sea explorations of the young man. Evelyn and Howell, after their one

walk round the pool, had settled for good on the veranda, and felt themselves well bestowed. One may not be too lean for a wicker chair, yet a little too lean for the play of a pool. So Howell felt happy where he was.

One or two kindly old gentlemen (personages, almost), whose families may have been at the seashore, happened along, as Evelyn had foreseen; and they did not appear to mind one young man the more. After all, Howell had a bright eye, a sinewy hand, and a tongue that could speak well enough when occasion really required. He returned amicable nothings with other nothings, or with something a little more, and one of the old gentlemen almost came to remember his name. Anyhow, he seemed to belong to the veranda set, rather than to the bohemian crowd that was frolicking below. Once Howell even ventured to mention a certain security that had been commented upon in the morning's paper, and the old gentleman did not disapprove—he even enrolled Embert roughly among the financial militia of the Street. Yes, yes; Embert was quite in place on the veranda.

Until—

Too late for lunch, yet in time for tea, appeared

Robert F. Sherrill. He seemed at the end of an easy jaunt, and his pocket bulged, as if from a bathing-suit of light construction. He looked nonplussed as he saw the pool so full of poetry, for he had designed to provide some poetry himself. He looked over a few of the poets and felt certain that Nature, that poetical dame, had done more for their souls than for their bodies. He resolved, after some due words of welcome, to enter the tourney. He could easily outshine anyone there; and when he encountered Evelyn among the non-swimmers he was doubly determined. Not for nothing his well-made, well-trained body; not for nothing his bathing-suit of lightest and scantiest material; not for nothing the bright sunlight and the perfect air; and not for nothing, assuredly, a distinguished gallery ready-made. He plunged a few times, splashed one or two of the young poetesses, with whom he readily became acquainted, reclined for a short time on the edge of the pool, like a rather robust Narcissus, and then came, dripping from the pool, to the veranda. This was hardly in accord with the conventions that ruled the place, but no objection was heard: a return to clothes for everybody was likely in a few moments. He splashed a few drops here and

there, and then, in all his pride, sat down near Evelyn. Close to her, rather. His thighs were as thick as they needed to be, and his muscular arms as well-rounded. In fact, the impression he conveyed to more than one was too anatomical. He tossed a word to Embert Howell, who would not have ventured to cover pool and veranda both—(that poor fellow who perhaps hardly dared undress); pitied the old gentlemen who were imprisoned for the rest of their lives in coats, vests, and trousers; and then concentrated on Evelyn.

There is indeed a power that issues from an individual who, stripped of all accessories and conforming to a high plan, stands forth as himself and his Maker have fashioned him. No incidentals; no clothes; no business; no relations, save those suggested by a faun in the woodland. Robert F. Sherrill, despite his scanty trunks and his scantier shirt (which came to little more than two enormous arm-holes), was now no mortgage-broker with various connexions (some of them perhaps dubious) along the Street. He was a beckoning, gracious creature from a rich Mythology, at home in the glens of blue mountains, in forest glades, at reedy fountain-edges . . .

Ah, well, whither are we straying, and whither is Evelyn Trent straying with us? And why must we make Embert Howell, close by, seem like a straight, slim young hoplite, too slight for his armour? For here is Sherrill, proposing to take, just as he is, a cup of tea and a scone.

He sipped his tea, after all, under a large bathing-cape that his host had had brought. Beyond well-shaped feet and well-turned, hirsute calves, he was no longer any considerable figure for the public gaze. If he still looked mythological in poetizing eyes, it was but as some Mercury, sans sandals, in his cloak as a traveller and the patron of travellers. Or perhaps he might have been made into a pilgrim—however profane a one—out of an early German opera. But never mind: when he appeared, shortly afterward, in his own proper clothing, he was merely Robert F. Sherrill, of the market, and all filmy adumbrations lent from sources mythological or operatic vanished from the feminine minds that had been occupied with him. Modernized, he still kept, as before, near Evelyn, while Embert Howell nursed his thoughts in a remote rocker and watched the tips of his own shoes.

"You ought to have gone in," Sherrill observed

to Evelyn, fastening a possessive eye upon her. It seemed to reduce her light summer costume to a mere shadow.

"Some other time," she replied easily, setting down her cup. The swarming young poets, crowding up for their good-byes, made a further exchange unnecessary and impossible.

V

Embert's Education Resumed

Evelyn Trent's plan for "finishing" herself had not originally included the idea of finishing herself by finishing someone else; but soon she began to see that little less than this was the work she had taken in hand. The process had begun inconspicuously enough at a church meeting, when a puzzled young maverick seemed to be ranging over a plain that had, for him, no boundaries and no features. It had continued at a tea in a fashionable quarter—a tea which she herself had more than half-suggested—where some of the right people might be viewed in a close-up. It had gone on in her own home, where a formidable, exacting mother had been tolerant, if not favourable. It had advanced through that rather absurd bathing-party in the country, where Howell had been discreet and had met some of the powers in easy, if temporary, intercourse. What was to be the following step? What the next *gradus ad Parnassum?*

Not that Parnassus itself was to be reached as a final certainty; yet one may endeavour, one may aspire. Surely one gets nowhere by standing still.

Evelyn bethought herself. She had no notion of putting things through with a rush, of advancing *per saltum*. A steady, graduated progress would be the best in the end. Why not, then, a reception—a reception which should have most of the aspect of an evening occasion and much more than the usual amount of underlying reality? A throng; dress, more or less; lights, stir, refreshments; plus a definite meaning to it all.

Evelyn, a few years before, had taken up book-binding (regardless of book-reading), and a half-dozen of her best things had been publicly exhibited and publicly commented upon. Very well; this made her a craftswoman. She joined a new club of craftswomen and was solidly a member (whether she bound or not) as long as she paid her dues. The club gave frequent receptions and dressed for them—except men friends, who sometimes took all the latitude that men take in these days. Especially were they remiss if invited to an early dinner; then they often wore day clothes, to be shamed, later, by the dinner-jackets of

late-comers who had not partaken of the club dinner at all. Thus irregularly and unjustly wags the world.

Evelyn had intimated to Howell that, since he was coming, he might as well come for dinner. She would reserve a table, and he need wear only his business suit. They might stay on indefinitely, for there was commonly something to hear and something to see. It all seemed simple. Indeed it was.

There was a big dining-room, with plenty of tables and plenty of people round them, and the waitresses seemed efficient and friendly. There was a bigger reception-room, and here Embert Howell was caught in the first of his serious social swirls. Most of the ladies, younger or older, were attired about as he would have expected; a few, much more so. There were several, indeed, who flashed through the throng showing costumes original in cut and more than gay in colour. Señoritas swung by in vibrant, vari-coloured shawls, and demure creatures chastely attired in purest white moved about as abstract visions from a show-window might progress, if but once set in motion. It was puzzling, in a way, and Embert Howell turned to Evelyn for an explanation.

She reminded him that this was an organization of women who had work to do in the world. They dealt in realities, in practicalities; they gave you, in common parlance, something to chew on. It happened that, this evening, two or three of the members, who might be described as high-grade *couturières* and daughters of high art, were exhibiting some new creations. The flashing or statuesque creatures who enlivened the great room were members, or friends of members, as the case might be. The one requirement was that they rise to their costumes.

Howell began to feel more at home, no matter if things did look somewhat like a fancy-dress ball. A society surface; but, after all, a substratum of reality. He was able at once to connect the affair with the ambitions and efforts of the workaday world, and no longer felt astray among the many kind ladies who half-smiled on him in vague uncertainty and then saw someone behind him. Some of them were quite middle-aged and could smile vaguely on a young man without reproach. Two or three of them taught the dramatic arts; others designed, and dealt in, period furniture and corresponding hangings; others etched; and still others painted—landscapes or portraits.

They were all busy; their endeavours all meant something; and it was possible to talk with them on some definite subject without too much effort.

He did not confine himself to the older ones, and he was not sure that he always selected members. The beautiful girl in white, as tall as himself, was friendly enough, though very composed; not, as he learned afterward, because she was a mannequin doing a part, but because she happened to be English and a guest. The lady in scarlet, with the long-fringed Spanish shawl, had dealt officially with child-nature in her day, and was swinging her bright garments in possible recoil from earlier routine.

"Come," said Evelyn to Embert, when she thought that he had sufficiently practised himself; "let me show you the Exhibit." Yes, Embert had manifested a certain measure of readiness and freedom, and nobody had been on hand to impede the flow of either. Not a fair test, perhaps; but still a successful one. The current had flowed pleasantly and he had had only to follow it.

The exhibit occupied a third room, and it was here that the craftswomen showed their mettle. Brass-work, oil-paintings, wood-carvings, batiks,

miniatures, needle-work—what had these devoted, industrious creatures not done!

"Here," said Evelyn, drawing Howell toward a show-case to one side. The contents, for some reason, had been slightly deranged, and there was a vacancy in one corner. "Look twice," she said, "and you will see one of my bindings. If I had known sooner about the exhibit, you would have had to look only once."

"You bind books?" asked Howell.

"I've done so, at times. One must pay one's footing somehow."

Howell had never seen a book that was worthy of exhibition in a show-case, but he was willing enough to believe that such existed, and that if any fingers could perform the work it would be the delicate ones now resting on that edge of polished brass. But the book, after all, was not present, and he asked humbly for an explanation of some of the other rarities that surrounded them: those curious strips of coloured cloth, for example. So Evelyn began on the batiks, those frail fabrics that demand so much and sometimes yield so little. Howell cared none too greatly for some of the designs, but was more than interested in the process. As Evelyn fingered the material and figured

the methods, she was overtaken, not for the first time, by the thought how long and how often art has got the upper hand of economics. How defend labour like this when work much more impelling was waiting to be done? Yet what was time, especially in the Orient? And then her thought, by some strange shift, flew to the remote sculptured temples of Angkor-Wat, as an example of human endeavour in its most florid and elaborate futility. Nor was she certain that the painstaking work she had seen on some of the elaborate gowns lately displayed could quite justify itself. Too elaborate; too wasteful of time, of fingers, of eyesight . . .

After Embert had left Evelyn at her door, that night (following a sort of benediction from a kindly club-member who had two sons older than himself, yet who still chose to teach Portias and Juliets), he began to realize that a good deal had been done for him and that he might well begin to think of doing something in return. He canvassed the theatres. They were expensive. He did not understand that preposterously increasing costs of administration had made the drama next to impossible for most, but he encountered the results at box-office windows. At last he found a house that might do. It had the name of being

intellectual, but Evelyn would not mind that —quite the contrary. It was very moderate in its prices, and it could be reached, in ordinary weather, without a cab. The plan seemed practicable and economical, and he put it through.

Let us not complicate Embert's problem by making the evening wet, or by adding a supper after the performance. He found problem enough on the stage itself. The play was a translation, from some Latin source. It abounded in general ideas; it employed a vast amount of dialectic; it was therefore correspondingly verbose, despite all trimming; it presented people whose natures and motives were utterly foreign to Embert Howell; and the conclusion—if conclusion it had —left him gasping in a vacuum. He was sorry to have brought a girl to such an unsatisfactory show.

But Evelyn, on the way out, seemed charmed by it. She knew, apparently, how to take all the ins and outs of those curious people. In the lobby she was still talking about *motifs* and technique. Even on the ride home she found a few kinks to unravel. In some way that was almost a total puzzle to him she seemed to have been having, emphatically, one of the times of her life. It was

about here that Embert Howell began to realize how far behind her he was, and how hard he must work if he expected ever to come abreast of such an alert intelligence. He was still incapable of counting in himself as one factor of her pleasure.

VI

An Education Continued

Catherine Trent heard, with no particular relish, her daughter's sketchy accounts of recent diversions. She was not thrown very far off the track by Evelyn's descriptions of the costumes worn of late by her fellow clubwomen nor by her surmises about the intricacies of Latin psychology. She thought Evelyn was wasting her time, and she made comparisons, indirect yet sharp-edged, between young Howell and Robert Sherrill. Who knew where and how that boy lived? Who knew how he stood with his firm, and whether he had any future there? Whereas Sherrill—did he not occupy a handsome apartment in a good street, and was he not capable, on occassion, of adequately entertaining two or three women with cakes and tea? Catherine Trent admired his bachelor state, maintained through several large rooms and officered by some Japanese or Filipino; and she liked his easy chairs and his particular brand

of tea and his grip on this present world and the high probabilities of his future. If only Evelyn would not toss the corners of his rugs with an ungracious toe and strain to look out of one window or another whenever he seemed to have something special to say!

But Evelyn was interested elsewhere. She still found enjoyment—and more—in putting Embert Howell through the hoops. After she had shown him a group of women who concerned themselves with the production of art, she decided to go a step further and introduce him to a group that patronized and collected art. The first group took art as a vocation; the second, as an amusement. Unnecessary to say that they were women of wealth and position. Once or twice a year they assembled at the Art Museum (to which, individually or collectively, they had given any number of tapestries, *cassoni*, worm-eaten chairs and suits of dented armour) to have refreshments for themselves and invited guests. Their heads stood in a rather portentous row, near the top of an enormous stairway, and tables lavishly provided with coffee, tea, and chocolate were not far away. It was, all in all, one of the few scenes from the local life that might have been transferred effec-

tively to the screen without emendation or addition.

Howell was propelled rather expeditiously along past the receiving-line, and did not have time to find these ladies very different from those who had formed a similar line for the craftswomen. Some of them were smiling, and some of them were passive and indifferent, as if saving their best welcome for people they knew. On the other hand, almost everybody seemed to be known, and it would have been easy for an outsider to stand impersonally on the edge, if Evelyn Trent had permitted. Howell, therefore, met many ladies, old, middle-aged and young, and several gentlemen who contrived to have leisure after five; and he learned their quality and importance afterward, if ever. Among all these was the well-disposed old gentleman with whom he had talked finance above that bathing-pool, who remembered his face without pretending to remember his name, and who was now busily asking everybody about a new Velasquez. He seemed almost alone in his concern for pictures.

After a little, Evelyn strolled with Embert into a series of less-frequented rooms, and tried to tell him about some of the people he had met: who

they were and how related—if related. But they were all meshes in an unknown net and he made little of them. So the two took more rooms, "school" by "school," and they thought they were becoming interested in painting while becoming more interested in each other. Evelyn liked the cut of his coat and the set of his collar and his deferential way—though he might have been a bit more wilful, even masterful. And Embert liked the harmony of her costume, without at all understanding how it had been reached, and the look of her kind, supervising eye. They strolled and strolled until they reached the grand stairway, which they began to descend as if in a tacit understanding to leave the place. Half-way down they met Sherrill coming up. He was arrayed with spirit, and would doubtless flutter the ladies still ranged on the floor above.

"How do?" he said rather loudly to Evelyn, with a scanty nod for Howell. "You're not leaving?" he continued, with a sort of congested concern.

"Perhaps so," replied Evelyn. "We're on the way down."

"Have you had tea?"

"Yes. And coffee and chocolate," she added, with malice.

"Have you seen the new Velasquez?" he asked, almost taking her by the arm.

"Yes, indeed. Lovely, isn't it?" This was the first she had heard of the painting, since she was one of the few persons of whom old Mr. Janes had not inquired.

"Then—then—" Sherrill was eager, but for a moment hesitant.

"We are going to visit the lower floor," said Howell, curtly.

"Of course we are," responded Evelyn, with gratitude.

Sherrill, left behind on the stairs, waved his hand, half in adieu, half in disparagement; they might divide the gesture between them. And, "That cub!"—to such words his lips seemed to shape.

Evelyn and Embert, once on the ground floor, promenaded among the Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities, for which neither cared a rap. They felt somehow united by a common escape from a common inconvenience—a tenuous tie, a mere inappreciable filament; yet a better tie than none at all. Evelyn even preferred to feel, within herself, that she had been rescued from a—a threatening something; and Embert, emboldened by the

thought of his recent stand, became almost protective. He safeguarded her against one or two of those inexorable Assyrian slabs, and even took her arm to guide her through any crowded doorway. Escape. The reception faded. The table and its urns vanished. The babble was hushed. The crowd was annihilated. Two, walking spaciously, through a spacious, empty palace.

But, after all, they were walking on marble pavements, not on air; and there really were a number of people about them, including a few observant guards; also, through the many big windows, the varied, stirring life of the streets was pressing upon them. So Embert presently came down to earth, and to business. He let paintings and statues slide, and told of some of his recent modest triumphs, and of some of his nearest hopes. The nearest of them was to address, in a business way, the kind old gentleman whom he had met near the swimmers and whom he had lately left upstairs.

"I'm going to try calling on him, next week," said Embert. "I think I've got something that he will buy."

"Of course he will," returned Evelyn. "I know him quite well. I'll tell him to."

"You will not," retorted Embert, stoutly.

"Of course not," replied Evelyn, pleasantly and proudly contrite.

Embert, then, put through his small deal unaided. His card brought back his name to Mr. Janes, who still remembered his hopeful face. The old gentleman realized that young gentlemen must get along, and must sometimes be helped to. He knew more about the securities offered by Embert than Embert himself knew, and even more about Embert's "house" than Embert, during his few months, had been able to put together. He had idle funds and he was quite willing to put some of them into a certainty. Embert's "house" thought that he had landed a rather large fish, and his credit grew. Only one grouchy member of the firm felt that Embert's sale might have been larger—until he came to the easy concession that other purchases might follow.

"I'll do it on my own," said Embert, severely, with a hard look at the hard floor.

"Of course you will," replied Evelyn. "That's far the best way."

Embert removed his heavy glance from that heavy pavement, swept it over a few statues, and ended it on Evelyn.

"I should say so," he observed.

Evelyn, who had lately been piloting him through a world of women, began to see that he were best left alone in the world of men.

"Well, I wish you all the luck in the world," she said, and suddenly offered her hand.

It was this hand, perhaps, that passed over to old Mr. Janes his sheaf of securities and took his check for them.

VII

A Lapse into Rusticity

"Yes; again," Anastasia McIntyre had reported; and Catherine Trent had given out an impatient "Thk!" over her embroidery.

Mrs. McIntyre had taken fullest advantage of the earliest opening of the autumn season. She had had her share in the tea and the tapestries, and had chatted—at too great length—with the ladies in the line. But there was so much to say when one had not seen one's friends for months!

And there was so much to say now.

Anastasia said it: how the absorbed young pair had wandered hither and yon, regardless of the heaped-up treasures of the centuries, and equally regardless of attentions to their elders and betters; and how one of the Museum guards had winked at another . . .

"Thk!" said Evelyn's mother once more.

And she said it a third time, along with some more articulate words of protest, when Evelyn began airily to sketch an outing for the coming

Sunday. This was to take her and Embert Howell a good many miles away into a region rather favoured by hikers, and was to be, apparently, a combination of picnic and camping-out—or a compromise between. However, it was to last only through those Sunday hours of Embert's leisure, and would probably involve casual encounters with other excursionists similarly minded.

"What a footless way to spend a holiday!" her mother exclaimed. "Miles to travel to get there, and miles to travel to get back."

"Autumn foliage," suggested Evelyn.

"Nonsense! There are trees everywhere. Much better to call on some of your friends in the suburbs."

"Little fire, with a coffee-pot over it," Evelyn submitted.

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted her mother. "Thermos-bottle."

But Evelyn had already canvassed the thermos-bottle with Embert, who had set his face against it. He was also against the two or three ratty little restaurants reported as existing in that wide domain, places where "eats," as they were called, might be obtained.

"Hybrids," he had said, using a new and sur-

prising word. Evelyn welcomed his enlarged vocabulary, and saw vividly the camp-fire with a small coffee-pot (provided by someone) bubbling above it.

"Yes," she had acknowledged. "Out of tone."

Her mother returned with another suggestion. "Make up a party," she said. "You know plenty of worth-while young men; and girls can always be got, if the boys are there."

"So I do. So they can. Well, somebody, in pairs or parties, will probably turn up. We may even meet people on the train. Then a worthless day will be made worth while."

"I see you know what I mean."

"Well, nothing fatal is involved," returned Evelyn, lightly.

In the end she put on a disreputable skirt that had not been cleaned since her last outing, and a sweater, and a rough pair of shoes—all as a revulsion recent from social involvements. When Howell presented himself he was rather more *comme il faut*, she was glad to notice, than she was. He wore a pair of high laced boots, corduroy trousers, and a sort of big-checked mackinaw. It was all as if he had done some tramping and hunting and fishing, over uneven country, before ever

coming to town: Evelyn felt that she was getting a bit of his early biography. He had also brought along his aptitude for informal life in the woods. He knew how to find, or to make, trails; and his brown hands, which did not always look their best when hanging from white cuffs, were habile enough in collecting twigs and starting up a fire. Evelyn began to feel that she had done him wrong through so many teas, and trusted, when one o'clock came, in the small clearing they had selected, that he would avenge himself through his coffee. He told her, now and again, just what to do and just how to do it, and she obeyed quite willingly: impossible to withstand a captain so completely dressed for the part. When he returned from a search in the underbrush for larger firewood, she saw him, almost, with gun and game-bag and a few incautious ducks or mudhens. However, under her busy fingers, the ducks turned to bacon, which sizzled and smelt as it ought to, and the coffee became all she could have expected.

"You know how," she said appreciatively, cup in air.

"I ought to. Coffee was one of the first things I learned. Sickness in the family when I was ten. Me to the kitchen."

More biography. A meagre household, with what to-day calls "self-service."

"Poor father in his lumber-yard. And little Geordie hardly out of rompers. Kind neighbours, of course; but . . ."

He dexterously caught up two slices of bacon and conveyed them to her paper plate.

The bacon and the coffee, between them, must have carried far. From windward, through the young maples and the hazel thickets, came hallooings and swishings; and soon four or five young people appeared, among them two or three of the poets who had adorned the swimming-party.

"We are out for foliage," one of them declared. "Where is it?"

"Everywhere," returned Evelyn, not to incommode herself too much.

"It's too early," declared another. "We haven't seen a dozen red leaves yet. Where is the inspiration?"

"Everywhere," replied Evelyn, as before. "There may be a little left in the coffee-pot. What do you say?"

"We say, Yes," spoke up a third, whom she did not remember to have seen before. "We have had our fill of green leaves."

Dispensing with further introductions, which sometimes do not carry far in the life of the woods, the newcomers stayed themselves on what was left of the coffee and the bread.

Embert, having livened up his fire, sent a young thing to a brook to wash the paper cups. He was not clamouring for additional company, but was willing to accept it.

" 'When the Green Leaves Come Again!' " sang one of the poets, with a crust in his mouth. "However, that's for spring."

"But isn't this the time to be writing spring poetry for next spring's publication?" asked Evelyn.

"Oh no," said one of the band. "So false!"

"So insincere!" added another.

After a little these sudden visitors found other woods through which to swish and halloo, and Embert and Evelyn were left alone again. The groves which, shortly before, might have yielded up a gracious band of fauns and nymphs, now seemed populated by a mere ragged group of workaday versifiers. Pan called in vain, and there was no response from the dryads. Nothing to do but tie up the essentials of one's kit as compactly as possible and move on to other scenes. Embert,

like a careful woodman, put out the fire; and he chose the new path.

This led through further tangles and up one or two rugged slopes. Evelyn, dedicated to seasoned endeavour by her very costume, took these rough ways without direct help from her companion. If she paused for breath, now and then, Howell, several yards ahead, was likely to call out, "Come on!", and Evelyn, with an added bit of effort, came on accordingly. Though she had brought him through a number of social labyrinths of late, she saw that he was not disposed to help her appreciably through the intricacies arranged by Nature. Once, as she paused to pant, she indulged a moment of bitterness. "Next time," she thought, just here, "I'll wear slippers and a sheer silk blouse and shall look feeble enough to justify a helping hand." Then she stopped to pick up a minor part of the outfit, dropped by Howell, and hurried ahead.

The return began at twilight and ran into darkness. But there was nothing outside worthy to see. The same clanking trip back through miles of ill-favoured country, badly cut up by other railways; some steel mills and cement factories, which reddened a glooming sky; and many industrial towns

in the making, and crying loudly for re-creation. Evelyn, after the afternoon's exertions, was tired, and was inclined to doze. Other young women on the train were tired, and were equally inclined to doze. They unaffectedly dropped their heads on the closest masculine shoulder, and were often comforted by the light pressure of the closest masculine arm. At one stage of the return, Evelyn herself drooped briefly to a shoulder. Howell let the head rest where it lay, but did not undertake to provide the pressure of the arm. Instead, he sat passive, like a patient young husband; and when Evelyn came to herself and sat bolt upright, it was to enter a tacit understanding that nothing had occurred which could enroll the two among holiday-makers of lesser breeding or of greater self-indulgence. Safely bestowed in her own bedroom, Evelyn half-regretted, or quarter-regretted, her momentary weakness; but she decided that Embert, on an occasion which might well have put him to the proof, had been almost perfect.

VIII

A Ménage in Rose

There are those who find red wallpaper exhilarating—and even, if supplemented by rosy globes for the electroliers, inspiriting and exciting. There are those, on the other hand, to whom such a combination would be irritating, exasperating, and even infuriating. None such, fortunately, were among those who left Claire Basquin's apartment at two in the morning, after some faint objections from adjacent tenants, and before the rather more definitely formulated protests that might follow some hours later. These visitors had enjoyed themselves in their own way, and they left behind them an atmosphere hazy with smoke, various untidy ash-trays, several bottles lately full of unauthorized liquor, and disordered sofa-pillows strewn higgledy-piggledy on rumpled couches. It was the end of an orgy—the orgy promised: not the vast, elaborated orgy that gives you scores of odalisques on divans, attentive slaves in numbers, and wine poured lavishly from empty goblets,

with a Sardanapalus of some age and country for a centre; but the sort of modest orgy that is practicable according to the restricted scale of modern living, when one's rent has been paid promptly for some months and when one observes due decorum in hallways and vestibules. There will always be the nervous and the irritable (and the ultra-moral) to complain; but landlords and owners learn how to adjust and compromise. There are times and seasons when vacancies become serious.

Claire Basquin, it was supposed, had obtained her present surname through a matrimonial relationship some time since terminated, and had shaded her Christian name to coalesce with the other. Fond parents, who could not be expected to foresee her career, had doubtless christened her Clara, and may even have done so in recognition of relatives who were worthy the honour. By her later name she signed her leases, whoever, in the end, might pay the rent they called for.

There is little use in applying labels. They do not explain; and they do not always characterize. But it is safe to put Claire Basquin forward as a—female. She had no life to speak of apart from the other sex. Without economic value and without social value (though visited now and then by

women who would pass muster), she played the rôle of a female, whatever that rôle's complexity—or its ultimate simplicity. Whoever attempted to take her on other terms found unplumbed depths—or disconcerting shallows.

Robert Sherrill found it easier to navigate the shallows; they were more numerous and of much wider extent. It was he, also, who had formed her taste on red wallpaper (with large gilt ovals) and red electrolier-globes (with crinkled edges). And it was he who lingered longest this evening, after the two ladies who would pass muster had gone on with their escorts, wafting vague adieux to the dishevelled scene and to the pair left behind. Sherrill lounged negligently among the sofa-pillows, and was none too careful about rising as the ladies who would pass muster finally passed out. He might have been more punctilious; for though they probably progressed from hand to hand, they were never—any more than Claire Basquin herself—claimed by two unpaired hands at once. Thus expostulations were escaped and separations avoided.

Still, the promise of expostulation had delicately permeated, in some cautious measure, the busy apartment throughout the evening, along with the cigarette smoke. It had taken some of the gilding

from Claire's walls, and some of the crisp crinkles from her globes, and had cast something like a shadow over her assertive draperies and rugs. It was still active within her, and it was likely to give continuing disquiet until some word had been spoken, effectively, or the reverse. Shall we, in touching upon this matter, try to raise the poor woman to our own high level, or shall we supinely sink to hers? It is to be feared that she herself will set the tone.

"Margie said," she began, speaking from amidst the overdone puffs of an immense easy-chair, with a recent cigar-burn on one arm, "that she saw you at the theatre, the other night. I suppose you heard her?"

It was one of Claire's grievances that Sherrill was so seldom willing to appear with her in public. She recalled how, on a certain summer evening, a poor girl of the streets had drawn from him the observation that cess-pools ought not to perambulate, since their useful function required them to be static; and she almost dared to wonder how far through the social scale this dictum might apply.

"Theatre?" he replied, from among the sofa-pillows. "Why, yes; I often go with the fellows."

"No fellows in this," returned Claire, brusquely. "Some women. And in a box," she added, to give further strength to her general complaint.

Sherrill began to recognize the occasion. "Oh yes; women now and then. Social obligations. Fences to keep in repair. Elderly ladies like such attentions. They don't always want to see you in your office rig. They don't always want to be signing papers."

Claire frowned. Too many words. And they went for little. "I'm not so much concerned about your elderly ones. There was a young one."

Sherrill sighed, with emphasis. "So there was. My client's daughter."

Claire sighed a little, too. Men were unsatisfactory. She poked a finger into the hole made in the pink satin by the cigar. Also, she pursed her lips and raised her eyebrows. "Well—" she said, and thought it best, for the present, to say no more.

Sherrill caught the tide on its turn. He rose from his cushions. "I suppose I'm to be told how to manage my business," he said, with a touch of the caustic.

"N—no," returned Claire, dislocated by this appeal to the great god that provided all. "No—"

She had to remain content with the simple account—or statement—of her friend, the Margie who had laid the grounds for her expostulation. She did not know that Sherrill had taken the box after a worse than weak-willed search for parquet seats: what he really wanted was to be seen in public with people whose names were known. Nor could she know anything about the return-trip from the theatre. Catherine Trent, at the exit, had encountered a fellow committeewoman, and a bit of "unfinished business," as they termed it, had started them off in the other's carriage. Evelyn, she assumed, would reach home, in due form and within fifteen minutes, by the cab she saw called, under Sherrill's assiduous escort. But Evelyn, meeting her mother a little later, in their front hall at the foot of the stairs, had frankly reported Sherrill's escort as altogether too assiduous. "He tried to kiss me," she declared, more in impatience than in vexation.

"Do you think so?" her mother inquired judicially.

"Do I think so!" Evelyn tossed her head angrily.

"Thk!" said her mother, as on other occasions. "These young men! But where," she added,

"would the world be if there were not young men?"

"I have known younger," declared Evelyn. "Thirty-seven!" she continued, with a shrug of the shoulders and a careless flip of the hand.

"You have," returned her mother. "Much younger. Too young, in fact."

"They knew how to behave."

"H'm! Unseasoned yearlings. With few prospects and the vaguest intentions. I prefer some decisiveness, and some—"

"Assurance? It seems to come with the years. For my part, I'd rather have some degree of respect." She thought of docile, accommodating Howell, and would vastly have preferred his arm on the train, in conformity with the many roundabout, to the other arm that had almost captured her in the cab.

This cab, with its searching arm, Claire Basquin could, of course, know nothing about. Otherwise she would not have stopped with her indecisive "wells" and her uncertain "noes." Still less would she have bidden her caller a half-reconciled goodnight, at however late an hour, and have adjusted herself, in her canopied bed, to things as she now assumed them to be.

IX

Two Heads over a Problem

It will not be represented that Catherine Trent was greatly disconcerted by the reported predacity of Robert Sherrill. In the absence of vividness from the report—for Evelyn had her own sense of taste and reticence—the attempt, if truly made, seemed remotely theoretical and lacking in a convincing circumstantiality. Besides—

Besides. Catherine Trent recalled her own early experiences as the bride of a peremptory young semi-rustic. The ruthless immediacy which, later, had decreed the wide devastation of woods and fields and, later still, had erected its monument in the shape of so much heavy cut-stone and so many cumbersome mantels and cornices, had been concentrated on her own person, and time had not altogether obliterated the recollection.

Again. With the turn of time's wheel, an undisciplined and indecorous immediacy would seem to have overtaken the eager generation of the

present day, with all the halting, hesitating, reluctant girls left in the background. Between these two days she herself had enjoyed—or endured—a period of quiet. She had emerged into a middle zone of self-control and decorum. The exactions of young love, as manifested in one generation, had relaxed; and the impertinent demands of a later generation had not yet risen to involve her concern as a mother. Yes, she had passed some uneventful years between times; but the memories of yesterday were now reviving to face the requirements of to-day.

She had no slight regard for the forcefulness and abilities of Sherrill. He had made a place for himself, and he was indisputably filling it. He was still of an age when momentum and self-confidence were at their maximum. He possessed a fine readiness for the aggressive; and many, no doubt, were the young women with a readiness to accept it.

"H'm!" she thought; "the wonder is that he has ranged free so long."

The details involved in this life of freedom did not rise before her with any particularity.

She carried her problem—or, rather, her conclusions—to Anastasia McIntyre. The two met

in an ample enclosure where women, tired of shopping, might catch their breath and lighten their perplexities; where they might set down, on free stationery, their thoughts for town or country; and where, owing to a certain degree of elasticity, even men might enjoy the same privilege: society, once more—and in its freest form. The assumption seemed to be that purchasing, or the pursuit of purchases, or the simple disposition to purchase, subordinated, and even obliterated, all secondary, all less worthy considerations.

Catherine and Anastasia sat deep in a wide brown sofa, between a woman who, perched on a mere chair, looked despondently at her samples, and another at a writing-desk who, in an excess of nervousness or an access of scrupulosity, had already spoiled two sheets of paper and was beginning on a third. We shall never know, alas, whether the first woman, despite the resources of an immense establishment, ever succeeded in her "matching"; nor whether the second, for all her incertainty and trepidation, finally got down her message—to whomever or about whatever—in satisfactory shape. As little to the purpose were the many small children, plaintive or assertive, at mother's knee, and the adult males who were

indulgently permitted to smoke in a side room and to read the already emptied newspapers. Almost as little to the purpose seemed the vast stores of merchandise that spread in an endless miscellany from room to room and from floor to floor. Despite this leisured, compact company, some people, somewhere, were doubtless buying. But Mrs. Trent and her friend were past all pretence of patronage.

"She is still young, of course," Catherine Trent was saying; "but even the youngest need not throw away her time."

"True," said Anastasia.

"Boy and girl affairs have never appealed to me," said Catherine. "I suppose a young man of twenty-two or twenty-three may be regarded as a boy?"

"True," said Anastasia. Thanks to her present years, she was easily able to extend the period of immaturity to thirty, and even beyond.

"I am not thinking of the present merely," declared Catherine. "I'm looking to the future. Naturally."

"Naturally," assented Anastasia.

"Eight or ten years ahead, at least," Catherine supplemented. "I want to see a young matron

with an established place in society, and with the means to sustain it."

"Naturally," assented Anastasia.

Here the woman in the adjacent chair rose with her samples in her hand and a new light of determination in her face. Her quarter-hour seemed to have renovated her.

"No young experimenter," continued Catherine, "whose experiments might possibly come off, or may fail altogether."

"By no means," said Anastasia.

"No unpractised young fellow with so much to learn and so many adjustments to make."

"By no means," said Anastasia.

Here the woman at the writing-desk, with a happy air of finality, got her third sheet into an envelope and left with a sigh of relief.

"It's too soon to lose patience . . ." submitted Catherine.

"Perhaps so," murmured Anastasia, in doubt. (Was she viewing a frown of perplexity or one of condemnation?)

"—and I don't know that I ought to assume failure for the hopes and ambitions of a beginner . . ."

"Perhaps not," murmured Anastasia, who was

willing to believe that a young man—a "boy," as she thought of him—might accomplish something, after all, through perseverance, or through luck, or through favour.

"But—" began Catherine, with intended finality. However, a romping child or two almost fell into her lap. She got up, with some impatience. "Shall we look at doilies?" she suggested, or commanded.

"Suppose we do," agreed Anastasia.

The doilies, at the far end of the same floor, provoked no enthusiasm.

"What I mean, of course," said Catherine, "is—" She dropped the doilies and edged along toward the table-cloths.

"Of course," assented Anastasia.

Catherine moved in the direction of towels.

"It does seem to me—"

"Naturally enough," assented Anastasia.

Catherine returned home, convinced that her ideas were valid and that they had been approved in an experienced quarter. Anastasia returned home happier and richer than she had felt for some time. She liked to "shop" and to price, and to feel, while under the wing of another, the delights that may be extracted from endless spreads of

merchandise viewed without responsibility and examined without scruple.

At the time of her mother's confab with her crony, Evelyn herself was lunching with Embert Howell in another section of the same immense establishment—or wide social exchange. The hour was early for lunch; but Embert, besides his rangings over the town, had certain office-duties to perform and could not always set the lunch-hour as he willed. Yes, they began early; but they lasted on into the time when ladies, in pairs and trios, "hardly knew, really, just what to order," when eager children imperiously commanded ice-cream, and when testy old gentlemen who arrived a bit late, to find a favourite table occupied, permitted themselves a touch of temper.

Both Evelyn and Embert were of a mind that the coffee was inferior to their woodland brew, but admitted that the chops and salad (in which there was no competition) were more than acceptable. Embert, as host, took the lead, without being too proprietary and possessive, as he viewed another rich and varied scene into which Evelyn (as a matter of fact) had tactfully inducted him. Embert, she was pleased to note, took the happy initiative, without prepotency and without equi-

voke. She felt safe. If the tide rose, it would rise equably; his companion, she was certain, would never be overwhelmed with a sudden onrush and left calling for help on some friendly but limited rock.

Meanwhile, he regaled her with the latest of his small fiscal triumphs. Another man of substance had submitted to Embert's chains and had been led in triumph through the office.

"So nice," said Evelyn, in measured terms, as they left the table. And neither knew that, at the very moment, Embert was undergoing condemnation as a little too young, a good deal too inexperienced, and no signal possessor of a fair portion of this world's wealth.

X

Prize-Ring

It seemed necessary—or desirable—to Sherrill, if he were to keep on suitably amicable terms with Claire Basquin, to escort her to some form of public entertainment. The choice of such was none too wide. He had the office to think of; also, a fragmental family. Theatre? He would as soon not. Dinner-dance at a public restaurant? Still reluctant. Ladies' night at his club? Oh, really, now . . .!

A fourth scheme presented itself. A prize-fight. More; *the* prize-fight. No simple bits of boxing at his club, where the fellows understood each other and kept within established bounds, under the eyes of escorted ladies who trusted—or didn't—that things would not become too rough; but a grand, comprehensive gathering, thousands upon thousands, in which everybody who had the price might take a vociferous share, and at which choice manners would not be insisted upon.

Sherrill, as has been seen, was really athletic. He did not sit unduly upon the edge of the Græco-Roman pool, simply sipping his drinks and testing occasionally the tepid water. Neither did he spend too much time in *corps à corps* struggles round the card-table. No; he often took his place upon the hard-wood floor, on which his "professor" sometimes laid him out, and on which, with good luck, he occasionally laid out the professor. Once in a while he would even carry his athletics into his office. This would occur when people of little note (whose trifling affairs he handled with increasing reluctance) complained about the unfavourable extension of a mortgage or protested audibly about the new rate of interest that he seemed disposed to exact. Then, with one hand on a sort of counter that shut him in from the lesser public, he would spring across, land cat-like on his feet, and demand, rather truculently, just what was meant. Occasionally one of these persons who was acting as an agent, and who therefore owed him no money and need yield him no compulsory respect, would ask him to reconsider his action and trip back over his counter . . .

Well, Claire Basquin accepted his invitation,

and appeared to be satisfied with it. The larger the gathering, the more important; so this crowd and its tumult would easily atone for any seeming neglect in the recent past. As the crowd, under the stars and the electric globes, swept on toward the vast pillared space, by many approaches and on foot or on tires, Claire felt the grandeur and consequence that only numbers can communicate. Most of the folk, she was pleased to note, were well-dressed; many of them, on arrival at least, were well-behaved; and, best of all, everybody had plenty of money. To grandeur and consequence, wealth was now added: intoxicating trio. More than compensation for some quiet evenings lately spent at home.

Yes, everybody had money. Everybody had to have money. Cautious Moderate-Circumstances kept away, or saw the pressing throng from its edges. To fill up a few insignificant chinks in this great consolidated gathering some scattered tickets were listlessly peddling in the lobbies of the larger hotels; but nobody expected the ultimate *coup d'œil* over the assembly to be greatly modified by such eleventh-hour measures as these.

Claire liked decorum, at some times and in some places. She felt confident that manners

would accompany money, and that most of the people who had paid their twenty dollars (or double that, in some cases) would behave with propriety. But alas, there are those who can command plenty of money without commanding any manners at all. They pullulate in large cities, and they congregate on such occasions.

For all Sherrill's liberal expenditures, he and Claire were too far from the pair of contending figures under the massed electric lights for more than the most general impression. Her eyes were too remote for vision, and her imagination not sufficiently practised for following the chops and changes of the struggle. Behind her, however, sat a fellow who had sharper eyes, or a swifter movement of fancy, or a more expert sense of ring-play, or an inflamed partisanship that, with all the rest, would not allow him to keep still. He was like an enraptured volcano, and he gave out a flow of volcanic language—scoriæ and red-hot pebbles—that disconcerted husbands, lovers, and escorts through a considerable circle. Sherrill, as a near neighbour, and as a man who, if required, could back up protest with action, turned round and asked him to remember that ladies were present. Perhaps he was more concerned with his

dignity as an escort than with Claire's sensibilities as a woman.

"What do you think this is?" bawled the fellow, in answer. "A church sociable?"

No, it was not a church sociable. It was an incitement to transport; it was an hour dedicated to ecstasy. A gifted nature, clairvoyantly able to see every blow, kinetically equipped to feel every shock, and spiritually capable of entering into the mounting animus that inspired every stage of the vehement struggle, was enjoying its fullest play. It is in such moments that one happily forgets oneself and one's earthy ties and really rises into life.

Life—what poor substitutes are offered for it! How we are fobbed off with approximations! And how few of us, docilely habituated to an inferior range of feeling, can rise to the high reality when it comes! On the other hand: To be set quite outside oneself! To feel only! To be too absorbed to think! Ah, happy, ecstatic soul!—with your crudely shaped skull, your riotous shirt-cuffs, your necktie louder than your lungs, and the dubious wench alongside.

The hubbub rose as the rounds went on, and remarks that might have been objectionable were

drowned in the general roar. Young gentlemen put off their gentlemanliness, and young ladies may have liked them less for it, or more. Sherrill surrendered himself to the undertow; professing and practising, he could not supinely let the flood rage past. And Claire was certain that, whether it was articulate or inarticulate (an open point), she was moving on the breast of some great wave whose very volume and momentum made it of transcendent consequence. She should not readily fall back to the placid level of the shore.

Later on, Sherrill said: "I suppose I ought to have given him one in the waist-band—he was a fair mark as he stood there yowling"; but Claire (whatever sorts of language she may have heard before) professed a choice curiosity toward the fellow's vocabulary and phraseology. It was all a glimpse, as she delicately put it, at a different stratum of society. This remark occurred in her rooms, where it seemed right that, after so much exertion, one should be stayed with flagons and comforted with caviare sandwiches.

The sandwiches were compiled, with some finger-flourishing, in a compact little *pièce* called a "dinette"—a happy combination of dining-room, kitchen, larder, and what not. This served

to balance the lavishness of the living-room, with its size, its hangings, its cushions, its rubber-plant, its flushed piano-lamp, and the rest. After all, even the relatively heedless may resort to a practicable compromise.

But even in this quiet retreat Claire Basquin was of the crowd. She had the mob mind. When she read the papers, she read the mob-papers. When she ran through a story-book—(the sales, if her attention was to be caught, must rise beyond a hundred thousand)—it was a mob-novel. When she played at a new song on her music-rack, it was a mob-song. When she went to a matinée, it was to eat mob-candy, purchased in the aisle, while she gave way to mob-laughter or to mob-tears. And when she experienced Robert Sherrill, vocal and gesticulatory beside her in the arena, he stood for the culmination and crest of the great mob-wave that was overwhelming her. Nor need the wave hasten to subside.

Claire, for the time being, was happy. She was queen in her own realm and the Prince Consort was by her side. Outlying provinces of the empire need not matter to-night, intractable as some of them threatened to become. For example, the florist and the corset-maker; but these satraps

might be dealt with at a later day. Again: there was the possibility of a rival in some foreign princess, on whom the Sherrill of the theatre-box, if not of other scenes and times, may have cast a too-attentive eye; but possession was a gratifyingly large proportion of the proverbial ten points. She felt sure, now, of a capacity for delimiting her own domain. The rebellious, the recalcitrant, the usurping—these were all far outside, and joy and order reigned within.

XI

Football

It is not to be supposed that Embert Howell, during the evening hours, lingered about the lobby of his hotel without making a few acquaintances. Men circulated; and women swarmed, even about the cigar-stand and the magazine-racks, which were in a corridor that was supposed to constitute a sort of masculine preserve; while as for the lounges and easy-chairs of the great "social hall" itself (if one may adjust his vocabulary to the ways of provincial newcomers), women were present in unnumbered variety. Some had plenty of acquaintances; some, none. Some were *habituées*—not to say old stagers; others were new to the establishment and to the town.

Among the latter was Cora Graves. She will be presented, rather humbly, as a good, lonely little girl who had her work and who hoped, before long, to find friends. Her work was in an

office for which she had qualified herself, in part, by a business-college course in her home town; and her hope was that, in the stir of the hotel, she should not long be left ignored and neglected. Like Howell himself, she occupied a tiny cubicle up in the overhanging immensity, and like other new arrivals she often cast a longing eye on the throngs that circulated below.

When Howell and Cora Graves became acquainted it must have been on a basis of innocence and informality; each doubtless recognized the small town in the other, however much the city may have begun to overlay them with its inescapable hard-finish. There was enough to say about scenes left behind and about prospects for the morrow. And there was no guile involved when Howell began to put into practice, for the benefit of a newcomer, the various bits of experience he had picked up, here and there, during the last few months. We hear sometimes of young men who are shy about entering places of public resort for the first time, yet may be as bold as a lion on the second. This applies, for example, to hotels and restaurants, where any monetary forecast may be difficult; and even, as one sometimes hears, to such safe ground as libraries and

museums. The cautious and the modest seem to learn the ropes one by one.

Howell pulled at a few familiar ropes, and presently put his hand to another. The football season was fairly under way and he invited Cora Graves to one of the earlier games on the university schedules.

No one will pretend that these earlier games are important, and no one will assert that they are expensive. The real crowds and the serious charges come nearer the end. But on the earlier Saturdays one may cheer in the company of twenty or thirty thousand—paltry number!—and may do it for fewer dollars than are expected as Thanksgiving draws near. In late October one may dispense with lap-robes; and the wearing of badges and flowers (both of significant colour) is not too strongly demanded by the mounting enthusiasm that comes later. Dollars go—relatively speaking—far.

Well, it is a pleasant enough sight to see even thirty thousand people—mostly young—strained from the crowd as it runs, after the fashion of an intelligent (or an automatic) cullender. Good looks; good clothes; good manners, for the most part; hearty enthusiasm, which can concentrate

as readily on two elevens as on two individuals; and sport still ranking as sport, and not quite as a business. Sherrills for one sort of diversion, and Howells for another.

Howell and his companion resolved to ignore some ranges of empty seats. A small enclosure, crowded, is more exhilarating than a large one that is not. But there was still plenty to lift the spirits in the miscellaneous display of flags, however few of them had any relevancy to the present subject of debate; in the antics of the cheerleaders, who could address themselves confidently to the vociferous lower rows; and in the obstreperousness of the rival bands, which owned the air whenever vocal cords were at rest. There was added interest from the fact that our two young people took opposite sides. Howell was for the visiting team, which was from his own university; while Cora, whose only alma mater was a business college, supported, with the zeal of a recent convert, the home team. By this happy arrangement cheers and wavings might alternate. And really, there was no reason why "close harmony," as it is termed in musical circles, should have prevailed.

There was, conceivably, a small snarl in the

general composition when, at the exit, Howell passed Evelyn Trent in the company of a young man. The two couples had doubtless sat in separate sections; but going out is less carefully regulated than going in. This young man seemed indifferent. Indifferent, that is to say, not toward Evelyn herself, but to any of her casual acquaintances that might, for the moment, appear. Howell received the impression that Evelyn had a richer and wider circle to draw on than he had pictured. Evelyn herself, bowing and smiling, took in Cora, readily enough, as a suitable companion for Embert in an earlier stage, but not for Embert *in posse*. And when next she met him she depreciated the relationship by disparaging the occasion that had brought it to notice.

"Rather a dull afternoon," she said. "Small crowd. That unimportant college from nowhere. I don't quite understand why I was asked to go, but asked I was . . ."

Howell resolved not to avow, or to declare, or to acknowledge, or to confess that the unimportant college from nowhere was his own, and he trusted that Evelyn, at the gate, had not noticed his colours. Yet he took some consolation from the fact that the other fellow, with more than one

mark of the sophisticate, had shown no cleverer judgment than his own. When Evelyn went on, critically, to declare that a later date would have been much better worth while, Embert's mind jumped forward to Thanksgiving, when things would probably be cold enough and crowded enough and exciting enough to repay attendance. He asked Evelyn for that date, whether at one stadium or another.

"Willingly," she responded. "It will serve to wipe out that poor little event altogether." With which bitter-sweet reply Embert determined to remain content.

Hence another environment, another temperature, and a more tumultuous and vociferous attendance. The thermometer called for a more active *assistance;* as did the fact that certain "conference" considerations were to be settled at the last hour. Large portions of the crowd huddled two and two under heavy rugs; and whatever shouting could serve to place one eleven or the other at the head of the list was not stinted. Howell and Evelyn, separated by no distance and by no differences, gave out a unified encouragement. The unhappy state of discord that had divided Howell and Cora Graves was no longer in force.

"Better to pull together," thought Howell, interiorly. "Much better."

Discords, however, may develop amid the most subtle of harmonies; in fact, modern taste seems to regard them as essential. Howell and Evelyn sat near a dividing line—or "bar"; and in the adjoining section—or "measure"—not twenty feet away, sat another couple. Though paired, the four made up some such sort of quartette as you find in the last act of "Rigoletto," with a certain diversity and variety of interests. In short, Robert Sherrill had decided to let one large gathering the more engulf himself and Claire Basquin.

The two sat beneath a wide rug checked, large and vivid, in crimson and cinnamon brown, and they stamped their feet and spatted their hands and watched their breaths, all in company with their neighbours roundabout. Sherrill was the first of the four to make his observations—to perceive the inaccessibility of Evelyn and the superfluousness of Howell. Claire was not slow in noting his intentness. However, she had only the slightest of reasons, if any at all, for associating Evelyn with the girl in the theatre-box: intuitions cannot work incessantly, nor upon material so slender as

to be almost non-existent. Sherrill's bow, a compound of assurance and uncertainty, led Claire to the simple conclusion that here was another acquaintance of his from "society"—that vague field which, whatever its vagueness, she could apprehend from the outside only. Well, such diversions of attention from his principal theme —as she rated herself—were not always to be avoided. She turned her look away presently, and satisfied herself with a firmer handclasp under the rug of crimson and brown.

Nor were Evelyn's intuitions any more active. A glance, accompanying a reluctant nod, advised her merely that Sherrill had another and a different interest, which she hoped would continue; and she was glad to note that the woman—whoever, in her marked togs, she might be—was "old enough." Thirty would do; why not?

As for Howell, placed upon the far side of his companion, he was intent on the game and on his companionship and noticed nothing. If Sherrill should seem, sneeringly, to disparage him, he could take that disposition (assuming awareness) better than once, since he now enjoyed higher standing with his "house" and with the social world than had been the case some months before.

In more ways than one he was beyond the range of Sherrill's "humph."

Yes, "Humph!" had been Sherrill's brief remark. It had come, curiously, at the moment when one of the muddy boys below had kicked a goal for the side that Sherrill had loudly favoured. Therefore a sudden change in his sympathies was suspected by certain persons immediately beside and before him, Claire Basquin included. His lung-power seemed all at once to have lapsed, and Claire, scenting a possible renegade, almost lifted the pressure of her hand. Still, he might have been affected by an inexplicable dislike for the boy manœuvring in the mud. She did not solidify his observation into a disrelish for a youth in the next section. Heigh-ho! How much better to give up trying to put this and that together and to set one's mind on the "full rigour of the game"! But that, as the author must acknowledge, with a slight cough behind the back of his hand, is not invariably an easy thing to do—though persons not fictively concerned have been known to escape from the field unharassed by such disturbing considerations.

XII

At the Opera

The only persons who know how to grade and present the occupants of opera-boxes are the discriminating young women who make note of them for the daily papers. True, they commonly take what may be called the easiest way; but, after all, the broad road is the best and safest, while a wandering into bypaths is seldom found to be worth while. To the casual observer in the parquet or the balcony, all the box-people may seem to be participating on equal terms in a brave spectacle; but when it comes to the acute dissection of the spectacle's component parts by these inquirers with note-books and pencils, it will be found that they know, they know. They know when, early in the season, illness or absence upsets a box's natural destiny. They know when, late in the season, patrons who are a-weary of music or are in Florida allow their familiar spaces to be filled with humbler friends and the still humbler friends of these friends. Sometimes the friends of

these friends, while making a gallant enough show in the eyes of the uninformed, suffer disappointment in the morrow's papers, when names carefully given out are callously suppressed. Hence, if not heartbreak, heartburnings, at least; and a sense of general negligibility that rocks all but the firmest natures to their base. Sometimes a young poet, already celebrated through the literary world, yet quite unknown by corporate society, may suffer one indignant heart-throb the more....

Catherine Trent's status as an opera-goer was in process of gradual change. She was a setting star. For the past season she had contented herself merely with a box on alternate Thursdays. She was mentioned when she appeared in her own box, and she was mentioned when, betweentimes, she appeared in the boxes of friends; but the sisterhood of the note-book and pencil were beginning to wonder how much longer they might go on according her a place in their firmament. When it was learned that a new opera-house, in contemplation, would have a smaller span of boxes than the old, and that she had taken no steps to secure a place among them, the sisterhood began to feel that here was a star which was paling toward extinction. But so it

goes. The old lights fade and newer lights arise. Of course that makes it less easy for us to turn in a comparatively effortless report; but possibly the public tires of old names and rather enjoys speculating about new ones. Forward, then, with unabated vigour for our task.

However, Catherine Trent was free to declare that she herself was tiring of opera both as a social institution and as an æsthetic manifestation. Old pieces weary us and new pieces overtax us. Old faces and new faces follow the same rule. Age steals over us; we cannot be young and musical and enthusiastic and humanly interested forever. Not altogether to be commiserated are those who perceive this tendency in time. We may still go to committee-meetings, with opportunity to squabble about realities, large or small; and we may sometimes wonder if we are proceeding wisely about the papers that we are signing, whether in our own house or in the offices of others.

It will be seen, then, that if Evelyn Trent were disposed for the opera, she was likely to attend without special reference to her mother. She had no fondness for the general hollowness of a matinée —a spice-cake with much of the spice left out. She preferred the different dress and the different stir

of evening. She could also give good attention to "novelties"—some of which, in wilfulness and cacophony, were novel indeed; while her mother, whose musical advance had paused forty years ago, liked Verdi and Gounod and their mates, centred on execution rather than on composition, and enjoyed the artistic roster most when it rested on a basis frankly biographical. . . .

"I still have two places for a week from to-morrow, Evelyn," said the kindly patroness of the arts, shortly after she had transferred herself from her pool in the country to her pool at the club. "Jack Milburn will do for Bessie. And you may bring some young man of your own. The one you had out at our place would do well enough, I expect. As for Erastus, he flatly refuses; but I suppose Mr. Janes can doze in the background quite as well."

"Why, thanks," replied Evelyn, busy at her pulleys. "I suppose"—without any great flutter—"that he would do as well as another." Her lack of flutter had no connection with the substitution of old Mr. Janes for a recalcitrant husband. Here was a steady, self-controlled intention to advance Embert Howell another stage. If he took his hurdle—she had imagined him at a horse-show,

which somehow had been missed—well and good; if not—well, there was interest too in a mishap, if not over-serious. She hoped for, and anticipated, a fair enough performance from him.

Embert was alert for his coming phase, and was glad to have a week to turn round in. One thing, he found, led to another, and a week spent in preparation was none too much. When he came up in a cab, just a little early, Evelyn's mother, who met him briefly, thought he had done very well by himself. True, he had hung only a soft felt on her hatrack; but, really, the rigours of the high hat were weakening—perhaps revolt should have come even sooner. More to the point was Embert's growing ease and confidence: the quiet circle in the home town was now on a far horizon—though, as a matter of fact, a younger brother, sartorially intent, was conning the mail-order catalogues with a studious eye. Old Peter, at the front door, acknowledged, before descending to his furnace, that the young man had passed Evelyn out to the cab almost as effectively as if it had been his own car.

As is well understood, two young men casually brought together in a box need not be on good terms. In fact, they need not be on any terms at

all: a mere passive tolerance quite suffices. Conversation is to be addressed, for the most part, to the other sex. Besides, conversational opportunities of any kind are often curtailed. Thus, you may arrive late, when the lights are down and when an attention still fresh tends to fix itself upon the earlier intensities of the stage. Then, there are usually four or five long intervals of darkness and harmony when talk, for the most part, is disapproved. Again, there is at least one social interval when people circumstanced on the main floor or in the balcony, or even in the range of boxes, may seek the foyer for change and relief; and there are moments when, if your social acquaintance is both wide and near at hand, you may absent yourself briefly for the benefit of other boxes roundabout. And when it is all over you get into your coat and muffler and say good-night without too great a delay. Thus it will be easy to believe that while Embert Howell and John Milburn sat side by side for nearly four hours their verbal exchange was limited to four words—two apiece.

When the lights went up for the first time, after a half-hour during which the adjoining boxes came to be filled, Embert decided that their own

box—as he conveniently thought of it—was of an aspect most conservative. Niece Bessie was a little young for extreme dressing. Aunt Amelia had quieted with the years and remembered her athletic interests. And Evelyn, in pale green, was—so Embert determined—neither too low in the neck nor too short in the sleeves. As he was seated within a yard of a beauty whose vertebral display rather disconcerted him, the contrast in favour of Evelyn was quite decisive.

With the first *entr'acte*, Milburn fastened himself on Evelyn with all his intentness. This left Embert to divide his limited addresses between his hostess and her young niece—the small change of civility. During one or two of the ensuing intermissions the expert Milburn was absent for the behoof of other friends; once he was seen two boxes away, and once he was glimpsed on the opposite side of the house—upon a delayed return from which he talked ingratiatingly, for a moment, against the music. Embert, new in this field, kept for the most part to his own place. In the absence of the other young man, whose pearls of speech were so irregularly distributed, he could converse sedately with the remaining occupants, or could remain silent when their own box was

invaded, in turn, by youths apportioned elsewhere and equipped with the appropriate patter. He had kept out of the lively pool in the country, and he was preferring, until more practised, to keep out of the uncertain whirlpool that now surged round him. A few more pleasant words from his hostess; some moments of kindly recognition from the elderly gentleman near by, now refreshed after a half-nap through certain arias and duets; and, in due season, some consecutive words with Evelyn herself, during a quarter-hour when she treated him to a promenade in the foyer. He appreciated her gown even more in action than in repose; but he could not prevent the reflection that humankind, even when parading at its best, is too miscellaneous for a fine effect. Costumes at cross-purposes; physiognomies that clashed. And who can blame him? There is no *type* when opera-goers assemble from the ends and edges of the earth. . . . Then a gong; then a prompt and general return to the matter in hand; then a repeated spatter of hands as the conductor again took his way through his dozens of men to the appointed place; then a sudden dimming of lights, along with the fraying bits of talk that simply must be wound up somehow;

and then a period of dusky quiet (save for orchestral crescendos or spectacular ensembles), during which a man might steady himself and consolidate his impressions.

Next morning, in the midst of general news and financial intelligence, Embert managed to cast a carefully careless eye over the columns devoted to society and amusements. He had noted that sometimes all the occupants of all the boxes were reported with great particularity, and that, on special occasions, space a-plenty would be given to the women's costumes. Well, despite his impressions and his anticipations, his evening had not been so grand, after all. Musically, his opera had been only a repetition; socially, that day of the week was not one greatly favoured. His account, compressed into half-a-dozen paragraphs, satisfied itself by simply stating that Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So had had Miss Evelyn Trent in their box. H'm! The juvenile Bessie suppressed; a contented widower metamorphosed into a stubborn husband; a gay young blade, circulating through the house at intervals, credited possibly to another quarter . . . All of which contained little comfort for himself. He was still—if ever—to become of consequence.

XIII

Terpsichorean

Evelyn had never asked Embert categorically about certain social endowments and qualifications that he might or might not possess; and she had never arrived at any conclusions by inference. For example, did he dance? But dancing, nowadays, is not an accomplishment to be acquired once for all and then to be maintained as a permanent possession. No, it means a constant course of instruction, almost a career; and vigilance, with application, is the price of acceptability. Perhaps too severe a test.

Well, then, she wondered, did he motor? Not that he had any perceptible occasion to do so. She might guess that his thoughts were on a car of his own—a proper and wide-spread ambition. But she could not know that, now and again, Embert would wrench from his younger brother the ramshackle contraption in which George was accustomed to spin, with a nervy recklessness,

about the vicinity of the home town. Meanwhile, Embert, whatever his desires and ambitions, was committed, owing to a change of locale, to docility behind the nearest taxicab driver.

Thirdly, Embert at table. During his first weeks he had rustically kept on seizing his fork with his entire fist; but example, if not precept, had soon instructed him. Fortunately, he was still young and adaptable enough to re-educate his wrist and his fingers. No exception now to be taken. It might be said that the first considerable problem for the matrimonially inclined—though why is matrimony mentioned just here?—the firm fundamental for the happy life, and a chief safeguard against disillusion, should be an identity of table manners, however much the hit-or-miss matings of the screen may declare otherwise. Two or three meals taken together—such is offered as a sine qua non. Let these manners be good, bad, or indifferent, but let them be alike. Otherwise, discontent, embarrassment, distress.

Embert was not, of course, one of those attractively lithe young auto-mechanics or structural iron workers, with a lovely face, a fetching smile, beautifully manicured hands, a latent capacity for costume, and the inescapable certainty of

wedding, in the end, the high-placed heroine and heiress. But he did well enough. To do well enough is to do well enough. Enough said.

If Embert did well enough for Evelyn Trent, he did more than well enough for Cora Graves. In her expansive and aspiring moods she even tried to emulate some of his recent accomplishments. The ruralities began to disappear and the urbanities to succeed them. Such a course is not represented here as a clear gain, but only as an indication of the usual trend

To vary his social experiences, Embert, who often met Cora on the common ground of the hotel's lower level, began to offer her a variety of minor diversions: the screen, the Zoo, an occasional popular concert. Cora was pleased, then flattered, then almost expectant. Girls are not invariably inspired when they attempt to establish a harmony between a man's attentions and his intentions; still less when they try to turn harmony into identity. To vary these widening experiences still further, Cora ventured to suggest a dance-hall. Good ones exist—supervision, decorum, and all that; and harmony might come to pass into identity, with opportunity offered.

Embert looked doubtful for a moment; but

they were sitting side by side in one corner of the lobby on—or in—a deep-seated sofa that seemed to call upon you to yield.

"Well," he said slowly, "I'm not much of a dancer. No dancer at all—that would be as close to the truth."

"Then learn, learn!" exclaimed Cora, brightly.

Embert considered. "Perhaps I ought to," was his inner thought. "You would find me a dull pupil," he said aloud. "And tiresome, perhaps, after just about so much time." He was imagining an interminable two-and-two.

"Oh, not at all!" cried Cora, confidently. "If only you don't tire of me!"

By some happy chance, such as may favour the inexperienced, Cora's one dance hall was quite reputable. She had been spared the dislocating effects that may be conveyed by others of a lower order. Respectability was here the great card: a hostess, some slight formality about introductions, and other aids to safety. Cora had visited this hall but once before, and in company with a particularly innocuous blond youth whose submission to decorous routine was instinctive. The present change from blonde to brunette might heighten the interest.

Embert picked up a few necessary steps without too great a delay. Cora took him compellingly in hand, with all the close pressure that was required, and produced results. Perhaps a latent aptitude had been waiting only to be called forth. After some early experimentation in an unnoticed corner, Embert felt emboldened to take the floor.

"You're doing beautifully," said Cora, arranging his arm in a firmer clasp.

Where had she herself acquired all this proficiency? Well, town and country tend more and more to act alike; the same clothes, the same furnishings, the same ways and manners, and the same dance-steps. Perhaps these latter, too, come out of the mail-order catalogue, with novel steps for every season. Certain it is that dancing, like everything else in these days, is taught by letter (with disks to aid). The post-office makes anything possible.

Cora guided Embert expertly over the wide, smooth—too-smooth—floor, and encouraged him to clap his hands when an unmistakable cadence told them that the orchestra was temporarily to fail, and promised him a new step when the music to come should be different enough from the last. Embert, under guidance, did not much

mind the swaying, tottering couples that sprinkled the floor; save for an occasional assertive elbow or an intrusive pair of unpaired hands, everybody seemed to be doing well enough. The Utopia, had he but known, was as humdrum, as bourgeois, as the Bullier itself, which, after some erratic and stormy years, has finally left the gay and the startling to other sections of Paris. What he did mind was the presence of numerous stags along the edges. Some of them were critical; and others, not amenable to the rigour of the floor itself, seemed covertly ribald. In particular, two or three indifferent children of the earth, of the Guildenstern and Rosencrantz breed; and among them he perceived, with some disrelish, the face of Robert Sherrill. Sherrill's eye, not too respectful, was on Cora. "Easy!" he seemed to be saying to himself, and perhaps to his companions. Embert felt sure that, during the next breathing-spell (which, otherwise, he would welcome), Sherrill was likely to take the accepted means to make Cora's acquaintance and to step out with her for a dance. That happened, presently, with all the regularity of clock-work. Cora, rather flushed, and perhaps a little fatigued by reason of her efforts over Howell, was willing enough to be guided by a robust and

confident partner. If he clasped her even closer to his high-coloured chestnut self than she had caused Embert to do, that might be only a variation in personal technique, no more unusual than variations in physical aspect; and if Sherrill, in passing near his associates, made a *moue* and raised his eyebrows, such over-expressiveness remained beyond her ken. But it came within Embert's. The fellow was not treating the girl respectfully. Embert took steps. He took twelve or fourteen. He quickly detached Cora from Sherrill, and said stoutly and clearly and with contemptuous indifference to the other man's view of the situation:

"Let us go on with the lesson."

It is on such an occasion as this that the organ—if there is an organ only—feels prompted to pedal its sense of drama and to see that runs of minor sevenths (with all intermediate notes included) shall chase up and down its manuals; and the excitement emanating from the organist's bench is communicated to hundreds of seats behind him. If there is an orchestra, with music specially arranged, the effect is still more startling. It makes the dressy diners, ranged round the dancing-floor, rise in apprehension from their tables; it throws

the waiters into a state of consternation; it brings into action the best management of the manager; and, in extreme cases, the police, garbed in the uniforms of the Coast, appear at the head of the grand staircase. For two young men, each a showy adept in his own line of work, have come to grips in the foreground. The ten-year-olds, of all ages, know where their sympathies are, but cannot be sure of the outcome—least of all if the management, or the police, or volunteers among the guests hustle the rivals into the background and out of sight before a result is reached. It is then that the ten-year-olds, of all ages, delay their spatting of hands to lie back expectant of a clear-cut solution later on. It is sure to come: the only question is, just how?

Sherrill dropped the girl with a sneer and a shrug learned from the silver sheet and returned to his friends.

"Not much of a show," said Guildenstern.

"Give us back our money," said Rosencrantz.

Sherrill waved his hand sidewise in careless dismissal of the situation; and that, for the time being, was all.

XIV

Comment from a Rival

Embert Howell thought it suitable to acknowledge his evening of opera by calling upon the Trents on the occasion of a Sunday afternoon tea. Further evidences of outmoded grandeur were pressed upon his notice: some preposterous stained-glass windows that would not be removed until the removal of the house itself; and some cumbersome metallic stalactites that hung from the centres of ceilings with the effect of impending doom. To add to the general cheer, Mrs. McIntyre dropped in. So did Jack Milburn.

Milburn had no intention of being friendly. As a confirmed metropolitan—or so he appraised himself—he did not mean to put himself out for a newcomer a year or two younger and a decade behind. As before, he fell decisively upon Evelyn, who displayed no obvious preferences; and Howell was left to the mercies of the elder women: a den of lionesses.

Catherine Trent was now the less leonine of the pair. She had encountered Howell in evening attire and held an impression not unfavourable. There was even a bit of protracted glamour. His manner was agreeably unobtrusive. Anastasia McIntyre, who thought she had received a sufficing clue among the table-cloths and towels of the big shop, was much more the lioness: she inclined to be cattish on a large scale. But Catherine soon modified this attitude.

"Don't you see he doesn't squirm?" she said rebukingly to Anastasia, between the double doors of the library. "Don't you see he doesn't 'try'?" "Try" meant, of course, "try too hard." Naturally, a young man, new to the town and its society, and with a place to make for himself, will not renounce the effort to please; but he need not proceed with too resolute a determination. Anastasia took this new hint and softened the rôle of censor. At least, she began to know the young man that nobody had known before.

Anastasia, like Embert himself, had had her taste of opera—thanks, like him, to opera-going friends. She wondered, not too inimically, what he had made of it.

"I couldn't understand," he acknowledged

frankly. "The words and the story, I mean," he added.

"Few do," she returned, with a possible touch of genial indulgence. "Perhaps it's just as well. I sometimes wonder why we put on our best clothes to look at people, who quite outdress us, going through all those mixed-up agonies."

"There seemed to be some agonies, the other night," he acknowledged. "But I didn't make them out."

"There are books that tell all about it," she thought she was safe in saying, "and they're used in some parts of the house. But not where you were sitting," she went on instructively. "In that quarter you either know the story or get along without it. You were a part of the show."

"Yes?" asked Embert, now indeed prepared to "squirm." "I didn't realize it."

"So much the better," declared Anastasia. With her age and her "position," she was almost prepared to characterize a young man to his face. "Nobody enjoys self-consciousness," she added, with a possibly oracular attempt at semi-approval.

Young Milburn, meanwhile, was not, one may be sure, preoccupied with opera. It was common; he forgot it as he forgot yesterday's dinner. He

plied Evelyn with sport, and with motoring, and with the theatres, present and to come. Over his misprized and neglected cup, he seemed disposed to bring up subjects in which Embert could not participate. When all else fails, one may put forward personalities that are the monopoly of a small, restricted circle. How many people and things he knew intimately that no newcomer, no outsider, could hope for acquaintance with! Evelyn responded freely, at first; then less freely; then reluctantly; then not at all. Presently, as she was at liberty to move toward the table and to review it if she chose, she stepped over to her mother and her mother's *commère*, to note how her young Daniel was doing in the lions' den. She found him unlacerated and composed. Old Peter, who stood outside the doorway, where, in a coat assumed for the occasion, he was watching the parlour-maid's activities, looked on approvingly as the prophet held his peculiar position, and thought him a fine young fellow. "Not too flip," he added, with a glance in the other direction.

"Peter," said Catherine Trent, severely, "how often have you been told—"

But what he had often been told will not appear.

Peter retired. He had seen many sorts of young

men. Most of them were faulty, of course; but he preferred those who were new enough to be cautious to those who were so practised as to ride carelessly over all the convenances. As he left he took with him Milburn's cup, which had been set on the highly-tooled cover of one of Evelyn's books.

"Improving," said Catherine Trent, elliptically, after the two young men, each in his own time and in his own way, had taken their departure. She realized that her house was now the predestined prey of miscellaneous youth, and hoped that the succession of youths would not harass her unduly.

"Huh?" asked Evelyn, as informal as her mother had been elliptical.

"I think," said Anastasia, "your mother means that the young man from outside is forming. She couldn't mean the other one."

"Oh, she does, does she?" retorted Evelyn, with spirit. "And what of me? Am I forming? Forming and finishing too? That's part of the idea, *n'est-ce pas?*" For Evelyn had never thought of her school as giving a lasting, ineradicable cachet of completeness, beyond which one need not strive to go.

Her mother looked at her narrowly. "I'm not so

sure. Of course," she added thoughtfully, "the place must expect to receive a certain variety of company."

"He isn't the worst lad in the world," observed Anastasia, looking toward Catherine for a hint.

"Nor the best," returned Catherine. And Anastasia paused in her attempt at praise.

"When you find the best," said Evelyn, tartly, "let me know." And she walked out of the room.

"Just boys, of course," observed Anastasia, pityingly.

"Yes," said Catherine, without further words. Howell was beginning to justify himself as a boy, and even as a "rather nice one"; but she had in mind an adult male who was more to the purpose.

He and she had a conference—another of them—during the next few days. As on some other occasions, the talk swung back and forth between affairs and personalities. At an early stage Sherrill, bearing strongly on the personal note, pronounced himself impulsive: he was not sure but that his attentions—impulsive indeed—during the return by taxicab, might have reached the ears of Evelyn's mother.

Catherine Trent chose to show no knowledge and accepted his reference to his impulsiveness as

a mere generalized bit of character-sketching. She allowed him to think, comfortably, that within the field of business he was prompt in decision and quick in action, qualities naturally to be prized in one who was almost her agent.

Sherrill touched on the personal note again, near the end. As she might well understand, he went about a good deal, and met many kinds of people in various places. At the club, the other evening, for example. There he had come upon a friend, a man about town, who now and then looked into the dance-halls. He had mentioned the presence there of young Howell—"the one I saw with Miss Evelyn at that party in the country, and afterwards at the Museum reception, and again at the football game": a categorical statement of encounters that seemed to make Embert Howell the sole squire of Catherine Trent's daughter.

"With quite an ordinary girl, too," he added, making a slight gesture of depreciation.

Catherine Trent, who had become disposed to accept Howell, looked at Sherrill with some intentness.

"I think," he went on, "that fellows should keep with their own sort, at least in public places. Perhaps he's doing so."

"Just a common girl—" Catherine meditated aloud.

"I didn't say 'common,'" replied Sherrill. "I said 'ordinary.'"

Catherine frowned. There were cases where ordinary was fatally lower than common. The common girl might be shaken off, while the ordinary girl might persist long enough to make good any of her expectations.

Catherine professed an unaffected concern, by gestures and expressions if not in actual words, about establishing a possibly wilful daughter in life. She overlooked the cab and she was ignorant of Claire Basquin. As she returned to business considerations she was careful to express a confidence in one field that might easily be extended to another. Howell, as a struggling boy, sank back into his original obscurity, with something of a black mark to boot.

XV

Among the Tapestries

Howell, during a short breathing-spell in the office, sat looking at his russet brogans. He was considering the education of his feet.

These feet were competent for certain purposes, but they still required a more advanced instruction in others. No better feet for hustling through the busy streets of the financial district, with side trips along tessellated halls and corridors; yet still a need for securer locomotion—in other than russet brogans—over ballroom floors. Instruction had begun, and he felt that it ought to continue.

An access of enterprise on the part of a new manager was giving opportunities within Howell's own hotel. There came along the idea of weekly parties. While invitations received (and required) no stress, Howell sought to acknowledge Cora Graves' amiability at the Utopia by rather formally requesting her company in the hotel parlour. She, seen on the floor, might extend the range of

her acquaintance; and he, in action on the same floor, might advantageously continue the course of instruction recently begun elsewhere. Howell saw his feet, encased in plain, lustrous black, sliding with an increase of habitude over the varnished surface, and felt his arm, as closely adjusted as might be needed and ending with a spread of fingers, deftly applied to his partner's back. Whatever hopes and ambitions he may have had for other quarters and other company need not be dwelt on just here.

"Delighted!" Cora had exclaimed. It was a delight that ramified in several directions. There was the promise of more attention (possibly accompanied by intention) from Embert Howell. There was the opportunity to bring her ability and grace more definitely to the social market. And there was, aside from any studied motive, the natural wish to indulge in youthful pleasure.

The delight was variously distributed through the establishment. There were elderly ladies who were "past all that," except as interested and critical spectators. There were many men who refused even to be spectators, but stoically talked business in the smoking-room, affectedly or truly unconscious of a new event in a new régime. But

younger natures and younger feet readily took the floor, and after Cora had demonstrated her grace and skill, even with such an uncertain partner as Embert Howell, the feet of the young men, to the number of three at least, found their way to her. One of them even cut in on Embert rather peremptorily. No wonder that Cora, writing to a mother and sister two hundred miles away, breathed triumph and had something to report besides the routine and rivalries of her office.

"Better and better," pronounced Cora, after she had inducted Embert into one more necessary, even obligatory, step. "I shall be giving you your diploma, before long."

Embert wondered how he might fare with a different partner. Many young women were bobbing and swinging past him, in various fashions, and he surmised the necessity of figuring on the personal equation in case of other personal contacts. Furthermore, some of these momentumful young creatures would be likely to leave him the lead.

This thought presently occurred to Cora. She became as laconically eloquent as a stop-and-go sign at a crowded crossing. "Hold fast!" for one moment. "Step ahead!" for another. If such

directions produced an occasional collision, no essential delay could be permitted. As with the student-flier, a prompt return to activity must prevent any weakening of morale.

Meanwhile, Howell, looking beyond the heads of the dancing throng, surveyed a wider and more important floor, the exact locale of which remained wholly indeterminate; and he saw himself successfully guiding over it another young woman whose identity was perfectly clear.

A man is not likely to hesitate about reporting a new acquisition or a new accomplishment. In one of those vast emporiums that sell everything and provide many quick transitions, Embert, dazzled by neckwear, and Evelyn, curious about rugs, met amidst a glittering display of glassware. Here each might shine: Embert by his proud avowal, and Evelyn by some sparkling, sharp-edged comment.

Evelyn anticipated the proud avowal. "I know," she said. "I've heard. You have been frequenting dance-halls of the cheapest description—"

"Have I?"

"—and have been stepping out with low creatures who—"

"I have not!"

"—who—who—" Evelyn did not finish. Instead, she broke into a broad smile. "The things I have heard!" she exclaimed, in open derision of someone. "They're hard to believe."

"Don't believe them. We've been having some dances at our hotel."

"Oh! That's it, then—or the rest of it."

"The rest of it, yes."

"I can picture the hotel. But how about the cheap dance-halls and the low company? I never see such places, nor meet such people."

"Neither do I. Can't tell you. Let somebody else do it."

"Somebody else has—indirectly." She seemed about to veer from farce to indignation.

"H'm," said Embert, merely.

Faced by silence—which, on the whole, she rather approved—Evelyn took up another phase of the matter.

"I suppose," she said, "that you were not dancing as a soloist. You had partners—or a partner? Social dancing seems to require one."

"A partner, yes." Embert saved a large cut-glass bowl by not sending it to the floor with his elbow.

"And how are you getting along? Well?"

"Fairly."

"That's good." Evelyn made no comment on Sherrill's report, received at second-hand, and no account of the partner who had started up Embert's course of instruction. If he had begun to learn, well and good. If he danced fairly, she should soon see that he danced better.

A few days later, Evelyn met old Mr. Janes at an auction. She was still after rugs and had heard of a hundred hooked affairs that promised a good choice. He was after coloured prints. He bought a picture now and then, and once in a while even a book. He possessed, in fact, that rare thing, a library.

Neither of them, however, was a part of the preoccupied little group that sat in front seats close to the lighted stage and that, with nods or lifted fingers, raised bids which those in the rear could follow only through the auctioneer's loud announcements of mounting values. Neither rugs nor prints were on, this afternoon; the two assistants, with great dexterity, were shifting porcelains across the stage. So our friends strolled, separately, through various rooms, upstairs and down, met on the big central staircase, and finally

settled in the depths of a wide sofa among tapestries.

Here Evelyn reminded Mr. Janes that there was to be a ladies' night next week at his club, with dancing.

"Is there?"

"There is. I could add a lot."

"You always do."

"I mean, a lot of people. Four, to be exact, if you will see that we are remembered. A school friend is coming to visit me in a few days. Her name is Clementine Langworthy. She is not so tall as her name. I want her to see something."

"I'll try to arrange that."

"I'm thinking of having Jack Milburn take me. The next thing will be to find a man for Clementine."

"Young men are numerous."

"I know. I'm thinking of the one who sold you those bonds."

"Young men are always selling me bonds. They are numerous, as I've just said."

"Well, the one I mean is the one you met at Mrs. Corwin's swimming-pool. When you were splashing about together—you remember?"

"Were we?"

"Well, you stood together on the edge for a few moments. Anyway, you sat together on the veranda."

"I recall the veranda."

"The bonds were all right, weren't they?"

"Yes, I collected on the coupons last month. It would have been sad for that young man if I had had to fall back on him for the interest, or even for the investment itself."

"Wouldn't it, though!" said Evelyn. "I wish all of ours could be paid on time."

"They're not?"

"They're not. We're tied up with the banks, and they're trying to unkink some public utilities. It's been two years, now; and it looks like two more."

"Things drag. With the best will in the world, things drag."

"Don't they, though! 'Great bodies'—the greater they are, the more incapable they seem of motion. But Mr. Sherrill—if you happen to know him—has hopes."

"Has he?"

"He looks more or less after mother's affairs."

"Does he?"

"She's almost thinking of giving him a power of attorney. 'Power of attorney'—is that right?"

"Is she? Sometimes."

"Well—" said Evelyn. "Those tapestry people seem to have their trials too. Is that fat blonde woman, with the pearls festooned in her hair, killing herself; or is the crimson young man in helmet and high laced boots going to save her the bother?"

"We should have to follow the thing through, to understand. Those twisted columns and those heaps of golden jars rather overpower me. The Flemings certainly had a full-bodied taste."

"In the next one the crimson young man and a young man in blue have their swords out. I wonder if that comes before or after? And it's so tiresome not to know where your sympathies ought to be—like breaking into the middle of a movie."

Evelyn languidly followed the series as far as it was in view. The beginning—or the end—appeared to be in the next room.

"There has been some talk of getting them for our club," said Mr. Janes.

"Think of living among them!" observed Evelyn.

"I'm neutral," he replied. "Clubs," he added, "can carry off things that wouldn't do in an ordinary private house."

"Clubs—with or without tapestries," murmured Evelyn. "I think a young man ought to belong to one; don't you?"

"It helps. The right one does. Not, however, a club of old fogies, and middle-aged fogies, and old young men who are on the way to be fogies. Unless it's strictly business. Your young man is a young young man."

"H'm!" said Evelyn, without further comment.

"If the young man is 'civic,' there are clubs to help him look after the city council. If he's 'cultured,' there are clubs that have illustrated lectures about the North Pole and those canyons in Utah. If he's just the average young man—"

"Quite so," said Evelyn.

"—he would do well to join an athletic club and train with men of his own age. He would save on initiation fees and on dues. These are the things that help buy tapestries."

"Those look 'cultured,' too," observed Evelyn, returning to the series on the walls.

"Don't believe it. Pride. Ostentation. I've spent years among our forceful illiterates. How well the old knights did without reading and writing! They had their swords and shields, and their caparisons. If they had need of 'clerks,' they

could get them—just as our titans can hire men of science at will."

"Yes, caparisons are right," said Evelyn.

"Their office-furniture and their private cars!" mused Mr. Janes, whose own quarters, where he had once practised law and where he now meditated on the concerns of two or three large corporations, were the height—or the depth—of old-fashioned unpretentiousness. "To be loaded down with the pomp of mere things!"

"Yes, caparisons are right," repeated Evelyn, with an eye returning to the violent doings and the violent architecture and the pomps and vanities heaped up in every available corner of the compositions. "Do you think they'll be in place for our dance?"

XVI

Under Consideration

"He told me so himself," declared Evelyn, with a touch of impatience.

It was the forenoon after her club dance. She was bringing a disarrayed wardrobe back to order, and her mother stood in the doorway, prone to question and prompted to comment.

Evelyn had set out, the evening before, in the due company of John Milburn. She had returned, as decisively, in the company of Embert Howell. At least, that was the order in which the quartette had reached the old house at two in the morning. Perhaps the volatile Milburn had elected to bestow himself, after consideration, upon the school friend from outside. Perhaps Evelyn was finishing the evening as she had planned, some time before, to finish it.

"I don't mean that he actually told me in so many words," she continued. "It was merely that the thing, in a way, finally came out."

Catherine Trent still stood in the doorway,

readjusting her impressions. She had not greatly desired Howell's escort for her daughter, but she was willing to listen to a re-statement of the case—as she inclined to regard it.

"I hate a he-gossip!" exclaimed Evelyn. "I hate any kind of a gossip," she proceeded, determined to claim no undue privilege for her sex.

"Your young man would seem to be something of a gossip, too. Though, of course, one is entitled to self-defence—"

"Self-defence? I should like to know where the need of that comes in! I tell you again, he has been picking up dancing from some girl at his hotel. His circle is enlarging, you see. I should hope it might. And why should a man confine himself to one place any more than to one partner?"

Evelyn, in her private thought, had formed no high opinion of Embert's ability as a dancer; and Clementine Langworthy had found one or two turns with him enough. In fact, he had made only a start. A wider range of partners would be needed. After a similar limited attention to Evelyn herself, he had lingered on the side lines or strolled through other rooms. Still, she had faith in his undeveloped powers: a little more variety, a little more experience; then, perhaps, a more success-

ful showing in more important places. Parnassus yet loomed ahead.

Evelyn had gentled her mother in the doorway by stating bluntly—as the facts had come to her—that the admired Sherrill, far from depending on reports from club friends about the evening at the Utopia, had himself been present among them; furthermore, that he himself had danced a bit with the young woman who had undertaken to be Embert's instructor. He had appropriated her rather impudently, it seemed, until Howell had reclaimed her . . . "Rather a weak fable, that!" she ended, with a grimace. "I suppose no other version was expected."

"Well, those places," said her mother, vaguely, "doubtless have some rules, if they're of any standing at all; and if the conventions . . ."

Evelyn confided her frown to the top drawer of her dresser. Here, at the same time, she packed in her dislike for gossip, for impertinence, and for lying—or the next thing to it.

Howell, at the club, had spent some of his spare time between dances (and during them) in other places than the ballroom, and in one of these he had met old Mr. Janes, with whom he had been prompted to talk about clubs in general. Embert,

along with several hundreds of other young men of social proclivities and ambitions, had lately received the prospectus of a new athletic club in process of formation.

"I've met the idea before," Mr. Janes observed. "About so many young men are induced to promise support—more support than their present, or even their immediate future, can warrant. Then, pretty soon, a large bill-board on some good vacant corner exhibits a grand new building in colours. Then, too many of the enthusiastic young men default; and after a year or two, the bill-board, much the worse for the weather, comes down, and the ground stands vacant, as before. There are already athletic clubs a-plenty, in full running order; and so far as I can learn they are not hard to join. Why not take one of them?"

Embert received a useful hint from Milburn also: he learned how to approach the glittering pyramid of refreshments without seeming to be too eager, boisterous and greedy. One must drape the brute. The fact remains, however, that Milburn had provided for the wants of Evelyn, Clementine and himself, all three, before Embert had gathered enough drive, properly palliated, to make his services tell.

"Trying to sell bonds, too!" muttered Milburn, carrying away two plates of salad and looking back for a third.

Evelyn got her assortment of minor fineries back into her dresser drawer, along with a miscellaneous assemblage of impatiences, and waited in silence for her mother to leave the doorway and retire down the hall. Instead, an additional figure appeared at the door. This was Miss Langworthy, who, after breakfast in her bedroom and a re-arrangement of minor fineries in the top drawer of *her* dresser, came along to babble at a time when nobody much cared for babble. Especially Evelyn; and least of all did she care for babble about Jack Milburn. But Clementine, in her dressing-gown and in the doorway, had found him lively company, a perfect dancer, and a "good provider" at an hour when the youthful physical organism was ready to welcome refreshment. He had verve, dash, spirit, and a dozen other shining qualities which Evelyn was made to feel were lacking in Howell. The same sensation seemed to have communicated itself to her mother, though she arrived at the common ground by a different entrance, so to speak. While she welcomed no praise of Milburn, whom she held to be

an impertinent, conceited young fellow, any comparison, however indirect, which might dim the glamour coming—however inexplicably—from Howell was acceptable to her. Evelyn might turn her back, and slam her drawer, and show an irritated reflection in her mirror, and even wish that Clementine Langworthy were well restored to home and family; but Catherine Trent was sure, now, that she had not lingered in her daughter's doorway too long.

XVII

Club Encounter

After Embert Howell had dropped his line a few more times in the city flood and had landed one or two more rather large fish on his firm's pier, it began to be recognized that he was potentially—yes, and even actually—an angler of some gifts and powers. An increase of salary was the first acknowledgment.

"I don't know how he does it," observed the grouchier member of the house. "I never should have picked him out for a go-getter."

"That may be it," returned his partner. "Those brassy boys who—" The rest of the remark was lost in a lower drawer of his desk.

Embert opened a bank account. Embert meditated on a motor-car. Embert sent a cheque to his mother, out in the country, and was glad to have it a cheque instead of a draft or a money-order. Embert, unwittingly, lashed young George into a fit of excitement, wherein the boy would have

been glad enough to renounce the lumber and the coal and the lime, and even the battered, muddy old automobile, that he might fly city-ward to rival and to surpass his brother.

"This burg!" he said contemptuously.

Embert's mother passed the check on to Embert's father, and Embert's father passed the cheque over to his bank, and the bank cashier passed the cheque along (verbally) to the local newspaper, and the newspaper passed along the cheque (in plain print) to the community of four thousand; and several hundred homes, not over-stimulated, hitherto, by the ambitions and stirrings of the great world, were privileged to read, next Saturday, how one of Elmville's Boys had Gone to the City and was Making Good.

George read it all, too. He soon saw himself storming some financial breastwork and flourishing some financial sword and taking, single-handed, some financial redoubt. He never stopped to imagine that the financial infantry may have to begin by peeling potatoes in barracks.

Embert, besides meditating a motor-car, was also meditating better quarters in his hotel, and even better quarters in a better hotel: at the least, he would have a larger room, and perhaps some-

thing that might fairly be called a suite. The social opportunities of the place, even with its weekly soirées, he no longer prized. If he were leaving altogether he should not be leaving much behind. He recognized some possible obligation to Cora Graves, who, as he felt, had been impertinently treated on the dance-hall floor, as well as by the comment of tongues elsewhere; and he made easy acknowledgments by inviting her to the theatre—an evening's entertainment which he could now offer without too serious calculation in advance. This young person, hitherto content, perforce, with the cinemas, rose with alacrity to so rich an opportunity.

"How dear!" she cried, and arrayed herself for a distinguished evening.

Embert felt that Cora, unlike Evelyn Trent, was scarcely equal to highly intellectualized offerings from abroad. A comedy-drama, not so deep as a well and not so wide as a church-door, pleased them both. It had its touch of "problem," but the problem was presented with due decorum and with entertaining lightness; and they were not made to feel that the drama was dying indecently on their hands, nor that they might soon be called upon to assist at a too-collective and

too-disgusting post-mortem. No one's taste was affronted; no one's mind was fouled.

"I liked it so much," declared Cora, over a deep glass of chocolate sundae.

"It went very well," said Embert, judicially. He thought of the Continental drama that he had witnessed with Evelyn. If that had gone anyhow, or anywhere, it had gone into thin air, or into the ground.

Cora, over her chocolate sundae, had become a bit shy and languishing; she even handled her long spoon a little lackadaisically. She was for making it all into an occasion; added to what had gone before, she even made it into a special occasion. She fancied that things might carry a certain weight of intention. Embert, who was displaying no gallantry, thought that he was merely giving his companion what is loosely called a good time, in acknowledgment of friendly services lately rendered. If he had had a smaller circle, or Cora a larger one, no compound of chocolate and vanilla could possibly have beclouded so simple a situation.

Cora presently conceived, by way of return, a kind of fudge-party. But her room was small, even for the four or five young people that might

have been invited; nor was there any strong assurance that the management, having liberally provided, below, for most social purposes, would countenance mixed parties in private rooms, however blameless the motives. So Cora continued to meet her few men friends on the more general ground. She sometimes bought an unneeded evening edition when she saw Embert feeling for change near the newsstand; and she was happy enough when the two came to sit side by side in one of the hotel's large, conspicuous sofas. Ladies of mature age who had left tender concerns behind thought they sniffed an opening romance. Gentlemen of like age wished that the season—it was now February—permitted young couples to stroll in the Park. Later on, there would be statues and things. If the statues remained invisible, one might at least look into someone else's eyes, with no annoyance to others.

Embert's eyes, and his thoughts, were turning toward a club. It would not be, after Mr. Janes's hints, a club in the making, but a club that was already a going concern. He did not quite aspire to quarters of his own under its roof, but he was ready for its lobby and its dining-room. It would not be a university club, since his alma

mater remained unrepresented in the city's life. An athletic club seemed a short, convenient cut. Many athletic clubs are populous rather than choice—they must be so to keep on living; and their maws, delinquencies considered, are likely to open voraciously for new members. Embert, with a little help from his office and a little more from outside, presently qualified, and was admitted to the free tread of a handsome mosaic pavement set round with columns, and to elaborate menus that promised more than chefs and waiters could always perform. Smoking-rooms, card-rooms, gymnasium, bathing-pool, even a library. Embert could now rub elbows with a few of the known and with many of the unknown. With some of them he might even speak.

For the first few weeks it was all like a hotel rotunda or the companion-way of an Atlantic liner. Faces appeared that were destined, seemingly, never to appear again; the extent of the place's population was only to be conjectured. Later on, the habitués began to detach themselves from the casual flood. The few who really carried things on—like the inner circle at Geneva, or the Curia at Rome—came to be ascertained. But it

took many lunches and much evening loitering before the crowd could be appraised.

On such grounds Howell enjoyed his club at intervals, and he passed a month there without realizing that Robert Sherrill was a member, too: the year-book of the institution had been much too voluminous for the study of names. It was left for a casual encounter in front of the clerk's window to show how one more discrepancy had been added to the many that, like the contentions of corpuscles in the blood, seem required for the health of the body social. Struggle, friction; yes, that appears to be the rule, in even the most amiable of companies.

"Why, what are *you* doing here?"

Thus Sherrill. He was coarse and loud. He doubtless intended an affront. Embert, younger, newer to the place, and less experienced all round, was on the point of replying flatly—with a curtness that would not greatly have lessened the flatness—that he was there because he was a member; but he was spared the need of making any answer at all by the clerk, who said:

"Mail for Mr. Howell," and handed out some letters.

Sherrill had enjoyed his own loud voice and

his own impudence—until this circumstance, inescapably obvious in character, had deprived him of an answer, and of any need of one. He wanted a reply, of whatever nature, and expected to find a telling retort. The situation really called for high words, and even for physical action. Take Paris, for example. As the club life of that city is depicted by the most genteel of our screen actors, something more dramatic would have offered itself. One gentleman would have struck the other across the face, preferably with a glove. There would have been starts, frowns, sneers, shrugs and ironical smiles; and a goodly little company would have gathered at once to smooth matters over before a serious re-roughening of them the next morning, at sunrise. . . .

Nothing of the sort happened here—not even a protest in behalf of good manners. Sherrill, more vexed by silence than by any possible reply, continued on his course. Embert, with a single glance at him, walked away, opening his letters as he went.

XVIII

Our Younger Brother

Embert's letters contained little of moment. Both were from the family and might as well have been sent to hotel or office, as heretofore. But Embert's vanity was slightly engaged, and it pleased him that cheques sent home by mail should be acknowledged at his new club address: he was adding another storey to his finely-intentioned edifice.

The first letter, from his mother, brought thanks, added some home and village news, and breathed a certain air of wonder and surprise—her boy was climbing beyond her ken.

The second was from the restless and panting George. His older brother, he felt, had got far enough along to be able to give him a leg up; he wanted a foothold in town. He had begun to detest coal and lime, and lumber outraged him. As for his car, to which he now seemed chained, he saw better ones every day. He had tinkered and tinkered with the old bus until—

Embert put the letters in his pocket and glanced at the columned doorway through which Sherrill had disappeared. He had held his tongue, whatever things there might have been to say; and he was not sorry. At such a juncture there are three courses open—perhaps four: to have nothing to say and to say nothing; to have little to say and to say it without trenchancy; to have something to say and then, having said it, to regret it; finally, to have plenty to say and yet succeed in keeping still. This last course, backed up by a sufficiency of matter, is doubtless the best. One's own fecundity gains in value through one's very self-control. One is glad to have remained discreet; besides, one's opportunity may come later and be none the worse for postponement.

Embert dismissed the invisible Sherrill and then, seating himself in a lobby chair, returned to his brother's letter. George was rebelling against his tiresome car-loads drawn over tiresomely familiar roads, and against the car itself. Well, he had learned at least two lessons: he had gauged the futility of small-town life for an up-and-coming boy; and he had become, almost unconsciously, an excellent practical mechanic in a day when such a training has its value.

Embert wished he knew half as much about cars as George did. Though he sometimes used the firm's car on occasion, it was almost as a chance acquaintance; he was glad when he did not quite feel himself a passenger, a guest, or even a stranger who had made the fewest of overtures to the complicated contraption. He must learn to do a little better driving on his own account and to arrive at a clearer understanding of the exacting creature with which he was cooperating: all this, if he were ever to manage advantageously a car of his own. This he confidently expected; but if he were to tour over rural roads on Sunday afternoons, he did not want to spend too much time under the machine beside country ditches, nor mortify himself before the young woman in his company by an ignominious tow to a repair-station. George, he thought likely, would never be found in such a situation.

He sat long enough in his tapestried chair under the electric bulbs to compose a theoretical reply to his brother. As he remained frowning intently over George's sheet of countrified stationery, members, strolling in and out, began to notice him. Bad news from some quarter? Determination to be a

public kill-joy?—poor taste in a newcomer. But he removed himself and his self-absorption from disapproving eyes by putting his letters in his pocket and walking home with them.

He should call upon George to endure country life a little longer. He could instance their father, left without a suitable assistant in the lumber yard; or their mother, whose health was far from good. But George, he knew, would have a rejoinder to all this: the little town was full of prosaic lads who would be glad to take George's place, and even make a career of it; and a mother's occasional lapses into ill-health ought not to hamper the courses of an energetic and ambitious young fellow with eyes wide open to outside opportunities.

Embert's letter was slow in getting away; in fact, it never got away at all. Before it came to be written, George replied—in person.

It was rather late on a Saturday afternoon, with Embert issuing from the hotel entrance, when a smart little car, lamentably variegated in its colour-scheme, suddenly turned the corner and drew up at the kerb. A young face looked out—and seemed to have found precisely what it was looking for.

"You!" said Embert.

"Me," said George.

The first stirrings of spring, even the earliest intimations of spring, had been too much for George—just as it was all coming to be too much for stored or partly-disused cars. George had arrived to meet the spring flood half way.

He was a husky, compact lad of eighteen or more, with verve and self-confidence for a dozen. With ignorance, too, for as many more. Ignorance wins more battles than knowledge: George did not know enough to be afraid.

The car was blatantly of the "trade." Its side panels proclaimed its status, as did the painted device on the oilcloth cover of the fifth tire. Together, they referred George and his opening career to a long, active, far-away street, with its mile and more of garages, repair-stations, accessory shops, and all the varied rest that goes with to-day's approved means of travel. Embert took in at a glance the saucy little machine and its meaning.

"You've caught on?"

"I've caught on."

George had landed in town with a jump and had boldly assaulted the serried mile of garages and repair-shops. He had had only to show his

face—and his hands. His face inspired confidence and his hands denoted experience. Now, after a week, his hands were more hands than ever; whatever room was left over from cuts and bruises offered an area for grease and oil. Besides, there was his manner; George, at the very start, had shown a clear disposition to own the earth and the fullness thereof. A cowed universe was ready to bow before him. He was triumphing, and triumphing alone. Nobody had helped him.

"Come, take a spin," suggested George; "and I'll give you the home news—if any."

Embert was repelled by the cocky, clamorous little car—triumphal chariot though it might be—and preferred to avoid it. He was able to figure himself as a host, so he invited George to hold his small sector of the kerb and step in to get acquainted with his quarters. He was even able, as the two passed through the thinly-populated lobby, to figure himself, if unworthily, as a patron who was condescending to an unimportant employee of the industry. George, who had no standards, could not be impressed; the glories of the world, if any, were in quite another neighbourhood. So was most of the interest. Deadwood, this hotel—at least, on quiet afternoons.

Embert wondered where George himself might be living. He wondered aloud.

"I'm over there," replied George, succinctly, waving his hand in one direction, and then correcting himself, by guess, and waving it in another. No locality dissociated from the "trade" was of much account. "With a family," he added.

"Pretty small space," he commented, when the elevator had taken him almost as far up as it could go. Some unnecessary cushions and a mirrorful of social mementoes made the room seem still more cramped.

"I may move," replied Embert.

"Yes," said George, seeing roomier quarters elsewhere. "You ought to have a car, too."

"I'm thinking of one." Embert had, somehow, the unpleasant sensation of standing still while his junior rushed past him.

"Some good used cars at our place," suggested George. "I guess they wouldn't throw me out if I sold one of 'em."

Embert considered.

"It would be all right, too," George went on. "I'd make it so. I wouldn't let 'em fool you. Then you could go out with your best girl."

"H'm," said Embert.

"I'm sure you've got one. I'll bet she's right in this building," he added, speculating on the immense opportunities stowed away in these fifteen or sixteen storeys.

"H'm," said Embert, again, now cold rather than merely non-committal.

"Or somewhere else," amended George.

Embert considered further. "I'll think about it."

"I could take you right along, now."

"Next week. What's the monthly storage?"

George at once became eloquent on rental, batteries, new tires, deferred payments, and other points that made up the business of his street. The wonder was that he had picked up so much so soon. But eighteen is receptive; not a blank page, yet ready to deal with a quick succession of impressions.

"And the best girl," he repeated in his serviceable countrified way of talk. His old rattletrap, it was easy to imagine, had been dedicated, on many Sunday afternoons, to the pleasures of farmers' daughters and to those of the Main Street girl-clerks.

Embert still refused light. "Next week, perhaps," he repeated.

XIX

At the Bazaar

Embert's car, when it came, was nothing remarkable; but as it stood at the kerb among the cars of other men, old and young, it decently held its place. And it was soon to instruct him as to the relation (if any such exists) between original investment and subsequent upkeep.

The car also took, with no great loss of time, the eye of Cora Graves, who found it the most suitable thing in the world to accompany Embert on one of his early experimental drives. The middle-aged ladies who spent their Sunday afternoons in the electric glare of the hotel lobby rather than under the sunlit dome of heaven, thought that another stage had been reached in an "affair"; and Cora herself, as she passed gaily through the lobby to the street, with Embert in close attendance, seemed to share the same idea.

"What a darling little car!" she exclaimed, as she snuggled into her place. Embert felt gratified. Approbation, expert or the reverse, was welcome.

Privately, however, he viewed the excursion in the light of a rehearsal. He was already seeing the second seat occupied by another passenger. The evening came, before long, when he was able to place the car, if but for all too short a run, at the disposal of Evelyn Trent. The church which both attended was giving, perhaps as the result of some old-fashioned impact, a sort of bazaar for the benefit of one of its outlying missions; and as the congregation was far too conservative to have allowed itself to become institutionalized—being without parlour, kitchen and other secular adjuncts—the bazaar had to be held in a public hall.

The occasion thus became doubly public—almost anybody might come along; and Evelyn, who had been put in charge of a booth or stand, felt trebly so. But her mother still held to some old-time notions, part of an earlier routine; also she held some thrifty views about the best way for them to contribute to the cause.

"We will serve," she said. "Let others spend."

Catherine Trent, at just this juncture, was feeling an economic pinch. The bazaar had come along during one of her "poor" spells. These were now becoming more frequent and more serious.

She would patronize heavily, but she should refrain from purchase.

"My daughter," she might say, waving her generous hand toward the booth where the industrious and persuasive Evelyn was supposed to be taking in much more than she could give out. "Our contribution to the cause," was her implication.

Mrs. McIntyre was present, equally conspicuous and equally unprofitable. She could run about from one brightly-lighted booth to another, praising the costumes of the young women in charge and the effective—or ineffective—display of their wares. If Catherine were in a mood for retrenchment, Anastasia was doubly confirmed in the same mood. The support of each would be but moral.

"You are charming, my dear," she said to Evelyn. "And these luncheon-sets are delightful. So are these boxes. What are they for?"

"Oh, for anything they will hold," returned Evelyn, with insouciance. She might find a more definite answer for a more serious customer.

The crowd filed by or congested in spots, as the case might be, and Evelyn met a number of people she had never encountered before. And

she felt quadruply dedicated to the public when Robert Sherrill, whose church affiliations were unknown and had remained unguessed, appeared as an early patron. He had had no direct word with Evelyn since the possible misdemeanour in the cab, but he felt free, at last, as one of the general crowd, to traffic with her across her table and to add a few words not strictly relevant to the cause. He was still in the good graces of the mother, and he hoped that the passage of a few months would have made the daughter less recalcitrant. Nor did he lose sight of the old tradition that young men attended these affairs to spend more than they could afford on things they did not quite want.

"Now, these," he said, putting a large, confident finger on a gaily-embroidered table-cloth, and resting an eye on its accompanying napkins. "I might take them. I have a tea-table, as you remember."

Evelyn remembered, without greatly wishing to do so.

"Here is a larger set," she said. "Brighter colours and more napkins."

"Your work?"

"No. Some of the faithful members of the

Sisterhood did them. I hope they get their reward."

"They shall. And these boxes—what are they for?"

"Oh, for anything they will hold. Knives and forks. Cigars. Pencils and pen-holders. This one, carved with Japanese iris . . ."

"I can use it. I haven't been seeing much of you, lately," he added.

"So busy with our fair," she parried. In truth, she had not lifted a finger for it before taking her place behind her display and studying some of the price-tags.

"I never see you when I call."

"Gymnasium. Bookbinding. Shopping. Girl's place"—with a saucy, careless generalization—"no longer in the home."

"If I could only—"

But at this moment Catherine Trent and Anastasia McIntyre came along, and they expressed approval of the articles that Evelyn was segregating as the purchases of her latest patron.

"Just right for your tea-table," pronounced Catherine.

"Come and see them in place." He had in mind a reconciled Evelyn, suitably accompanied.

"And this lovely box," commented Anastasia. "What is it for?"

"For anything it will hold—shears, paper-cutter, fountain-pen . . ."

"Yes, yes," cried Anastasia, delightedly. "They always end in some such place. No ink-spilling after that."

Thus she helped dissipate Sherrill's endeavour into thin air.

Nor did his position tend to solidify when Embert Howell came strolling down the aisle to see how the saleswoman whom he had brought in his car, and whom he expected to take away in it, might be making out her evening. Embert, despite a definite object for his search and the clouding presence of feminine auxiliaries, saw Sherrill first of all.

Embert had now gained some confidence by virtue of being a fairly successful business-man, a club-member, and a motorist in his own right. Besides, he had long since classified Sherrill as one of the essentially profane, as one of the last and lowest when it came to good works and one of the most froward when it came to bad.

He fixed Sherrill firmly.

"Why, what are *you* doing here?" he said.

He was conscious of a more significant audience than Sherrill had been able to command.

All the same, doubt. General surprise. Perhaps a measure of consternation. Nobody but Embert and Sherrill himself knew the reason for this question.

However, it was not the time nor the place nor the company for "words." Sherrill frowned; but if the women about him felt him as taxed with an extreme degree of secularity—if they were led to view him as a sophisticated worldling altogether out of the picture—let it be so. If any fair creature chose to regard him as a devil of a fellow—and two open-eyed young things that had just approached Evelyn's booth seemed to think him such—there was no damage done so far as he could apprehend. He turned his back on Howell and, as an advantageous patron, began to collect the parcels that Evelyn's helpers had prepared.

"Why is Mr. Sherrill here?" asked Anastasia. "Why, he is here to help along our cause, of course. And he has been doing it quite liberally. And we hope that other visitors will be prompted to do as well."

Evelyn had no desire to lead Embert unduly into the coils; and as she looked through the passing crowd she detected a worthier prey.

"Oh, Mr. Janes," she called; "you're not going to pass me by?"

The old gentleman was a willing victim—a predestined one from the moment he had decided to attend.

"Impossible," he said quietly, as he paused and began to look over her wares.

"Impossible?"

"I mean, impossible to pass you by. But don't be excessive. I had to go pretty deep to help on those tapestries. To-night I'm only a financial fragment."

"They're in place, then? I wish they might have been there for Clementine. Heaven knows where she will ever see others as good. I mean, as large and as elaborate."

Mr. Janes looked at her critically. "Perhaps your estimate is correct."

"No, no," said Evelyn. "You've been generous indeed. And here's my display. Be generous some more."

"Anything I want? Anything I can use?"

"Now, Mr. Janes! Remember the story of the pretty little girl and her ugly old grandfather—"

"Yes, yes. The stage is set"—with an eye running over the booth—"and the play is cast.

You're the pretty little girl and I'm the ugly old grandfather—"

"No, no! Listen. He gave her a penny, and then, a little later, ugly as he was, he asked her for a kiss. Then she said, 'But if I give you a kiss your penny won't be a present.' "

Everybody laughed—except Sherrill, who glowered, and Embert, who was still a bit tremulous after his first decided stand. That is to say, Mrs. Trent laughed, and Mrs. McIntyre laughed, and the two open-eyed young things laughed, and Evelyn's assistant laughed, and Jack Milburn (who happened along just in time) laughed, and Mr. Janes laughed.

"I see," he said. "I'm not to expect full value. I'm not to be paid for a good deed."

"Exactly," declared Evelyn. "Mother, you and Aunty McEye help this ugly old man to make a choice."

Mr. Janes, who was almost handsome, smiled benignly, and the two elder ladies came altruistically to his aid.

As for Jack Milburn, who was young and vain and rich, he was disposed of even more profitably.

Meanwhile, a woman of thirty, unattended and dressed with discretion, had been observing this

little group at a short remove. Behind a decorated post or two Claire Basquin surveyed, somewhat bitterly, the social scene. She had had an unemployed evening on her hands and some restless money in her pocket, and in her brain some recollection of certain festivals, not dissimilar in nature, which, as Clara Stiles, she had attended in lesser towns. She had been particularly struck by Sherrill's colloquy with a young girl in charge of a nearby booth, and had been displeased with the effect of social backing that presently had reinforced it. The girl, in particular: so well-placed, so easy, so self-assured. And that older woman, standing by, who had re-arranged a lock of the younger's hair and had thrown a filmy scarf to better effect about those slender shoulders. " 'My client's daughter,' " she thought she heard Sherrill say again; and she wondered what exact ground she had for challenging him, and how successful her hazardous endeavour might come to be.

XX

An Excursion in Real Estate

Sherrill had returned to Evelyn's booth, at an hour suitably late, to suggest accompanying her home—probably on the basis of newly-acquired merit. But Embert Howell was already at hand, and Evelyn said, rather roundly:

"Mr. Howell brought me, and I believe he is meaning to take me back . . ."

"I am," declared Embert, and Sherrill prepared a sour, disgruntled withdrawal.

"But Mother and Mrs. McIntyre are still somewhere about, I believe. If you could just see them home . . ."

And Sherrill left the field.

This service that Howell tendered Evelyn on the occasion of her bazaar was the first and briefest of several. On free evenings and on disengaged afternoons the car might be observed in front of her mother's house, and Catherine Trent began to look upon its owner with less disfavour than

before. He was getting on in the world. He was no longer a negligible, still less a prejudicial, boy.

The early spring was stirring and the countryside called. It was too soon for foliage, save the boldest; and too soon also, if asphalt and concrete were left behind, for firm road-beds; but the car gave a wider choice of routes than rails had offered through the previous autumn. Embert was able to develop his skill along crowded highways and learned to deal circumspectly with the many railroads that broke in upon them. At such junctures *toujours l'audace* was the last motto he would have chosen to adopt. All feats of dashing dexterity he was content to leave to the gifted heroes of the screen. These were always cutting across tracks an instant before the bars were lowered for the passage of the express; and despite any amount of uproar and onrush they invariably got over in safety. If they were prompted by the comic spirit they sometimes took the adventure in reverse order, backing skilfully across the tracks just after the express had gone by. But Embert was not prompted by the comic spirit. Straight ahead in regular order was the rule he kept in mind, with the smallest of risks on the way.

On the Sunday following Evelyn's bazaar,

Embert's little two-seater, looking as new as new, stood before her mother's house, and Catherine Trent, at one of the pompous, wide windows, viewed the departure. Beside her stood Anastasia McIntyre, who, along with mother and daughter, had been put through a short, early lunch by Peter, and who hoped that, in case she lingered on, a late dinner of proper proportions might make amends.

"Very fair little car," said Anastasia.

"His own, too, I believe," replied Catherine. "He has a club, now," she added thoughtfully. "And a better position with his firm, I suppose."

"Moving along," observed Anastasia.

The day was fair; the country was greening in spots; other cars crowded the roads; and a general hope was in the air. After Embert had made some miles, the droves of cars thickened even beyond the wont of spring's propelling hopefulness; and they were all moving along in one direction under an apparent impulse that meant more than a simple escape from town.

"Something's going on," remarked Embert.

"Probably," returned Evelyn. "Let's find out what."

As they approached another railroad-crossing, a brief break in the general progression of traffic

gave opportunity to a small car just behind them to swerve out of line and to pass ahead. The car was decorously black, like Embert's own, but as it manœuvred past him he thought he caught a glimpse of the tense face of his brother George, fiercely bent on progress; and by George's side—if George it was—a young woman whose face he failed to get. Just then there was a clang at the crossing, a movement of closing belated bars, and the noisy threat of another train close upon them. Embert prepared to wait, with all caution and docility, for the passage of the express; but the other car, forging ahead, got across with the bars grazing its rear tires, and with some concerned faces, at various windows, wondering over the issue. Other faces, on the opposite side of the train, were doubtless wondering how the issue could have been successful.

For a moment or two the rushing train shut out all view of the fleeting car.

"Yes, it was probably George," said Embert, with a deep breath and a shake of the head.

"George?"

"My brother. My young, enterprising, go-ahead brother. It looked like him, and it acted like him."

"Well!" said Evelyn, and stopped there. Perhaps she was venting a breath of relief at the escape of a human creature from dire peril, even of his own seeking. Perhaps she was giving a gasp of admiration for a dashing youth who had broken through so much docile routine.

The press of cars, after this interruption, moved on persistently, and thickened as it proceeded. Soon the harmless, unharassed country-side began to take on a different aspect: dredges at the ends of uncompleted ditches; signs marking streets and "avenues" that were half laid out or wholly in the future; a number of bungalows and Spanish villas set down here and there as an incitement to builders yet to come; everywhere a smart sprinkling of orange flags, all clamouring a single name. Presently a sort of improvised railway-station, with a passenger-train—perhaps the last one that had impeded Embert, and ready, it may be, to return to town for another burden of "prospects." Near by a big, graceless shack, with a larger orange standard in front of it and a score of busy clerks inside it. All round it hundreds of motor-cars and thousands of people swarming on foot.

"A new subdivision," said Embert, interested.

"A 'development'! An 'improvement'!" emitted Evelyn, with bitter contempt.

Evelyn saw only with the eye of the body, and her spectacle was indeed repellent. But Embert was able to see with the eye of the mind, and he could readily share the optimism of the crowd that lived on the edge of the future. Profit for the promoters; possible profit, directly or indirectly, for the purchasers; and ultimately order out of confusion. He and the swarming patrons alike saw an assemblage of happy homes and lively shops, just as he and they alike saw floods of flowers on the maltreated ground and cataracts of foliage on trees now next to bare. Hope: an excellent situation when the many who are passively hopeful can meet half way the few who are actively so. The canny dozen, and the less canny half million.

Embert, near the office, got out of the car for a moment, having ranged it near another that resembled the one which had cut ahead of him at the crossing. It was, in fact, the one which had cut ahead of him at the crossing; and the young fellow who stood by it, fastening its rear plate, was, after all, his brother.

"Ha!" said George, jovially and cheekily, "I've run off with your best girl."

"Eh?" asked Embert, severely. "Who is with you? And I wonder," he went on, in a tone of reproach, "that anybody should be with you, or that you should be with anybody, you crazy."

"Who's with me? Look and see."

A strange, inadequate introduction; but Embert looked. George's companion was Cora Graves.

"So exciting, all the way," declared Cora. "Especially when . . ."

Embert, after noting that Cora was exhilarated rather than flustered, turned toward his brother. Perhaps George would deign, some time, to explain the why and wherefore of this sudden new intimacy and the swiftness with which it had been developed.

Cora, meanwhile, made an explanation of her own. "The office," she said, "is thinking of sending me out here. Lovely arrangement, isn't it? But who cares anything about a poor girl's convenience? Me, carrying a lunch-basket, and two trips a day! Or how, I wonder, do all those people inside there eat?"

"We'll find out," declared George, competently.

"I think I should," observed Embert.

He turned toward his own car, ten feet away,

and took George with him. Cora, meanwhile, sat passive and pleased. George was good in himself. George, as a brother of Embert's, was perhaps no less good.

Embert led George to where Evelyn was sitting: she might as well have a sample of his family. George wore his Sunday hands, and the one he laid on the edge of Embert's door was not forbidding. George also wore an informal grey cap and did not forget to raise it. George had solid shoulders, some close, light-brown curls, and a pair of sharp, observant blue eyes. George, while not all that a brother of Embert's ought to be, might pass.

George saw at once that he had not run away with his brother's best girl. He perceived—or rather, felt—that Embert's best girl was a little beyond his range. It had been a simple thing, after one or two look-ins at his brother's hotel, to get on pleasant, small-town terms with the willing, habituated Cora; but Evelyn, he sensed without difficulty, was another matter. He had not been impressed by Embert's quarters, but he did feel a definite impact from the first member of Embert's new circle. Evelyn was kind, and she was gracious; but she was not markedly near, however

affable she might show herself toward Embert Howell's brother.

George returned to Cora and accompanied her to the office where she might learn whether she was to starve or eat, and whether she might have to travel an endless number of miles daily, and whether, in the end, she might not have to transfer herself to some more convenient lodging. As the pair moved toward the office a robust young man came out of its front door. It was Robert Sherrill. Two or three other men, of the underling type, were with him, and it seemed evident that he had an interest in the new enterprise. Embert and Evelyn saw him as soon as the others did.

"Well, shall we go on?" suggested Embert, from his place in the car.

"Yes, and the farther on the better. I've had enough of this 'improvement,' " she declared.

"Well, George is with her," said Embert.

"Ah, the heroine of the dance-hall?" asked Evelyn.

XXI

Feminine Demands

Yes, Embert acknowledged, the girl in his brother's company had been the heroine of the dance-hall; heroine, or good angel, or victim, or what you like. As he reviewed the incident, now rather remote but still somewhat distasteful, he thought of the wide hard-wood floor in one of the upper storeys of his club—and Sherrill's too—on which a compactly-built "professor" danced round ambitious beginners and often landed them decisively on their backs.

However, the professor gauged their minds quite as closely as their bodies: how much spunk and spirit had they, and how could they best be touched up to put forth their liveliest efforts? Some of these young men had more spirit than good temper and could easily be depended on to exert themselves; they enjoyed landing vicious jabs on their instructor—who enjoyed them too, with no appreciable sense of damage: he was ex-

pected to take all they could give, and more. Anger: the royal road to athleticism.

Embert, after some observation, put on the gloves. He looked a little slight in his boxing-togs, and his face commonly escaped the distortions that accompanied the efforts of the other young fellows to pay the professor out. In fact, his physiognomic play left much to be desired—frowns and scowls and bared teeth and snapping eyes would have put a greater determination into his muscular system. Hence a few prods and pokes the more, visited upon him. But Embert took it all, rather stolidly, as a part of the established routine; he was not going to give way to anger over anything that was so completely a part of drill and so essentially lacking in animus He had not really been angry since, as a boy in high school, he had had his trouble with the football coach.

"Get mad! get mad!" the impatient director had cried and had tried to spur him on with a kick in the seat of his khaki shorts. Right here, felt Embert, was indeed sufficient reason to "get mad." Offended in his personal dignity, he gave the surprised coach all he had, however insufficient, in his arms and legs, and then walked off the practice-ground. It fell to his father, a man of

limited spirit and no great capacity for indignation, to adjust matters with the school authorities.

No, Embert would not get angry in the course of mere practice; he should save his anger for a genuine occasion.

His encounters with Sherrill, at the club, were infrequent. Sherrill, apparently, scorned his earlier exertions with the gloves and continued to regard him as a slight fellow. Embert could only hope that a few years of growth and a few seasons of practice might bring him to a physique as admirable as Sherrill's own.

He noticed, for Sherrill, an increased degree of consideration among the club members. Sherrill, in fact, as a man of business, was growing, expanding. He had lately added outside concerns to inside ones by acquiring an interest in an organization that "operated" in suburban acres, and in acres even beyond. Ah, the fascination of land! You can cut it up, and sell it, and trade it, and mortgage it, and pay piled-up taxes on it, and make (or lose) fortunes in it. . . .

Sherrill came to be seen more often at Catherine Trent's house, and she herself was occasionally seen at one of his offices. Evelyn began to wonder about a general power of attorney—rather dreaded

by herself and apparently disapproved, inferentially, by old Mr. Janes. She speculated on her mother's becoming interested in those raw, dishevelled acres eighteen or twenty miles "out," and hoped that she was not destined for one of those Spanish villas, all stucco and twisted columns, on the far edge of nothingness.

As for Cora Graves, she had been callously transferred from the main office of her firm to the remote branch office that she had looked at and disliked, and had found new quarters more conveniently situated. Embert himself, also on the point of leaving the hotel for a two-room apartment, made nothing of this interrupted relationship beyond wondering whether the enterprising George would find the girl in her new environment.

After two or three more Sundays, with special trains and the supplemental efforts of hundreds of car-drivers, who were welcomed (along with the free passengers) under the large orange standard, the heads of the organization with which Sherrill had associated himself began to see daylight. The thing was to be a success—for them; and profits were preparing for a first division. Sherrill received his helpings. They were not considerable, but they

put more ready money at his disposal, and this money got into notable circulation. Claire Basquin was one of the first beneficiaries: some slight refurnishing, an extension of wardrobe, and the like.

Sherrill told her nothing in detail about his widened fortunes. The great god, Business, continued to function behind a sort of curtain, and the source of the bounty he handed out continued to be mysterious. Claire took, with little question; she did not wish to be asked again if he was to be told how to manage his own affairs.

Still, this new liberality came at an awkward time. She wanted to touch on the girl whom she had observed at the bazaar, and who, if she was to appear repeatedly as an adjunct to his business activities, ought to be looked after with interest, and more than interest.

Amidst the inflammatory wallpaper and under the scintillating rose globes overhead, Sherrill sat smoking a cigarette in the over-upholstered armchair, while Claire herself nervously twisted a tassel at one end of the sofa.

"Margie says—" she began.

Her friend Margie had reported Evelyn Trent at the theatre. She was now to serve again by making a supposititious report of the bazaar.

"Margie says," she began again, "that she saw you at that church fair." Claire had held in for a fortnight or more: her limit.

"That" church fair. It seemed specific.

"So? Didn't notice her. Who was she with?"

"There was so much more to notice, of course."

"Yes; a good many things."

"Things, yes. And people."

"People, naturally. The people have clothes; and the clothes have pockets; and the pockets have money. To turn the pockets inside out and to get the money—that seems to be the object of those bazaars."

Claire teased her tassel discontentedly.

"I suppose the different booths were interesting?"

"Some of them were."

"And the things they sold. And the people who sold them."

"Some of them were. Some of them were decidedly not." Smoke in the air accompanied this unsatisfactory statement.

"Margie says—"

"Well, what does Margie say?"

"She says you spent most of your time and money at one booth."

"Come, come; what are you driving at? And I will thank your precious friend to mind her own business."

"Always 'business'," said Claire, reaching out for a catch-word. "Always 'business.' Were you there"—here Claire took a long yet necessary shot—"were you there with your client—and your client's daughter?"

"We've had this before," said Sherrill, rather angrily.

The long shot appeared to have reached its mark. The girl she herself had seen was probably the girl she had already heard about. Younger. Prettier. Richer. In society.

To make sure.

"I'm sorry we have it again."

"We needn't have it again."

No denial; no palliation. So, then; younger, prettier, richer, in society . . .

Claire, with a few half-articulated words, struggled back to a sulky silence. Some gain, however; after having heard of "my client's daughter," she had now seen her. She knew where Sherrill's interest was engaged, and upon just what a type—more, upon just what individual. The extent of that interest was still to be measured.

Well, one could not hope for everything at once. A third stage remained and was to be reached before tears and clamour could be let loose . . .

She looked up. Sherrill had placed his half-smoked cigarette on the arm of the easy-chair (where it would burn another hole) and had risen to his feet. His eyes were turned toward the small entry, where hung his hat.

Claire came out of her sullen study.

"Not going? It's early."

"Is it? It seems late."

"I'm sorry, if time has dragged."

Yes, time can drag in restless or exacting company. And time can drag in tight shoes—most of all when some better fit seems possible.

"Be pleasanter, next time," he said, and was soon gone.

Claire dropped her head on the arm of the easy-chair. A few tears may have prevented the second burn from becoming as assertive as the first.

XXII

Bachelor Quarters

Toward the end of April Howell gave up his lobby, his newsstand, his gossipy matrons, his absorbed men of business, and his eyrie near the roof that covered them all, and took an apartment of his own. It was perhaps the smallest ever seen, but an unusual number of doors made it appear roomy to the casual eye. It was also vocal to the most casual ear. Despite a specious solidity of woodwork displayed by its interior decoration, he soon found that he was living in a cardboard castle. Thin floors and thinner walls. The place rang with words and music; words jovial or contentious, with the varying hours, and floods of melody from all sides. His nearest neighbours (though they all seemed near) enjoyed radio during an early breakfast; and dance-tunes, from more directions than one, often filled the hours that followed midnight. Only the young, the robust, the free from nerves are fully qualified for the

close co-operative living demanded by the modern builder.

The place was quietest on Sunday afternoons, now that spring was calling the massed tenants outside; and it was on a Sunday afternoon that Embert Howell attempted, in his new quarters, the rôle of host. For the time being, nobody wrangled, nobody cackled, nobody defiantly operated the criminal loud-speaker.

"How quiet!" were the first words of the first guests.

These first guests were Evelyn Trent and her mother.

"Let's go," Evelyn had said. "It's always interesting to see what a man can do by himself."

"We know what a man can do by himself," returned her mother. "We have seen Mr. Sherrill do it. And he did it very well."

"You don't expect them all to be just alike. We might make up a party for him. There's Mrs. Corwin, who hasn't gone back to the country yet. And her Bessie."

"That child wouldn't add anything," replied her mother, discontentedly.

"We might even have him ask Aunty McEye . . ."

"I don't believe I care to see any more of Anastasia just at present. She came in day before yesterday and had too much to say about her troubles. Dollar-and-cent troubles, of course. Well, I have mine, too."

Yes; investments that awaited the slow grind which was to rehabilitate public utilities; and more money tied up to the immediate advantage of others and only ultimately to the possible advantage of herself. Yet if Sherrill had sung a siren song, he had very probably believed in the merits of his latest enterprise. At any rate, too much of Catherine Trent's money was going—partly by persuasion, partly by concealed force, and partly through legal forms—into the newest suburban boom.

"I wish you would talk with Mr. Janes," said Evelyn—a suggestion which her self-sufficient mother found almost an impertinence.

Sherrill had gone into these acres with great gusto. He had tired of dealing, in a small way, with small people—foreigners, chiefly. He could work his will on them with some ease; but mere ease comes to lack in stimulus and exhilaration. Larger affairs involving larger people—such, of course, would be his natural trend.

"I don't care if her club dues *are* behind," said Catherine Trent. "And I don't care if she *has* charged too many things at her precious dressmaker's. Let her learn to be careful, too."

Evelyn smiled doubtfully. She could not always draw the line between her mother's major affairs and her minor ones. She knew how capable her mother was in the matter of a prompt and easy transition from major to minor—or from wholesale to retail, in the familiar language of commerce.

"I hope her demands are not exorbitant."

"No; but they're inconvenient."

Evelyn looked out of the cab window. "This must be the number."

Embert met them promptly at his door, in the solemn silence left behind by fellow-tenants who were coursing the country.

The chief feature of Embert's living-room suggested, to feminine eyes, a library table from which pen and ink, pipes and tobacco-jars, had lately been removed; and his infinitesimal kitchenette, which was probably devoted, in general, merely to early coffee and rolls, tended to weaken under the stress of a tea. Evelyn saw at once both the possibilities and the necessities and took hold, to his interest and her own, of the situation.

She was pleased to dabble, and he was pleased to have her dabble. The cubicle disclosed no informal and mortifying masculine secrets: "How neat it all is!" said Evelyn.

Her mother, meanwhile, surveyed at her leisure the living-room and wondered from which of several doors a swinging bed might sometimes issue. The furnishings, she surmised, went with the room and were like those of the next suite, and the next; and the shaded lamp was probably repeated through the building a hundred times over. A pink hyacinth, on a window-sill, added no originality. But, as Catherine Trent said to herself, it was all "seemly"; slight and recent, compared with her antiquated pomposities, but not at all bad for a young bachelor.

After some light clatter and some light chatter, all of which came in combination through half-opened glass doors, the small festival shaped itself and was brought to the living-room table. Orange pekoe, with some biscuits and cake from outside. "Not too much, fortunately," said Catherine Trent, in commendation. "Sometimes these young men incline to overdo."

But she had her mind on other things than simple refreshments, or even on her daughter's

marked countenancing of this advancing young fellow; and soon—Sunday or not, social occasion or not—her words turned toward the practical affairs of the workaday, week-day world.

She had been asked, lately, to see the futility of six per cent, and she felt a little the worse for not being quite able to do so.

"It's paltry," she submitted to Embert, obviously in the words of another.

"Paltry? Where should I be if many people thought so?"

"It's prosaic," she went on, quoting from the same source.

"We can't live altogether on poetry," he returned.

"It's poor-spirited," she continued, "—in this hustling, adventurous day."

"Dear me," said Embert. "I say, as much of six per cent as you can get. And use your six per cents as security for the purchase of more six per cents."

"Every little bit added . . ." chanted Evelyn. "Only, don't let's be too secular on this holy day. Another cup?"—to her mother.

Catherine Trent took another. The flavor was agreeably different from what she was accustomed

to, and Evelyn's brew was highly acceptable. She looked into this second cup, and then at Embert, and wondered if, after all, he wouldn't have been well worth listening to before this. Old Mr. Janes had already listened to him and probably had not repented it. Evelyn obliquely reminded her of this fact.

Old Mr. Janes now came into the talk still further. It appeared that he had lately invited Embert to lunch at his club. "He was most kind," said Embert.

"Well, well!" murmured Catherine Trent, non-committally. Had Otho Janes been indulging in mistaken condescension, or in high appreciation, or what?

"There were some wall-decorations," Embert proceeded, "that he had recently helped buy."

"Yes," said Evelyn, "and I was with him when he was looking at them. Flemish tapestries," she added, for her mother.

"Well, well," said Catherine Trent again. "My girl is up to all sorts of things, isn't she?"

"How did they look in place?" asked Evelyn. "I haven't seen them since the auction-rooms. They seemed rather big and splendid, then. And a little confusing."

"Well," said Embert, the only authoritative reporter, "they made a pretty wide spread. Chariots and canopies and soldiers and gold jars . . ."

"I remember the soldiers," said Evelyn. "Warriors, I suppose we must call them. Or even warrior princes. One was in crimson—"

"And the other in blue," Embert contributed.

"And they both had their swords drawn," Evelyn went on. "I never made out which killed which, if either. The end of the trouble must have been in the next room."

"At the auction?" asked her mother.

"Same at the club," said Embert. "The wind-up must have been down the hall, or in the library, or somewhere. Not where I was."

"I liked the blue one," observed Evelyn. "He was younger; and so earnest."

"The red one was a stout fellow," submitted Embert.

"Too worldly, too sophisticated," pronounced Evelyn.

"'Sophisticated'!" objected her mother. "I hate the word. Don't use it. I'd as soon have you say 'meticulous' or 'intriguing.'"

"What shall I say? Knowing? Worldly-wise?"

"Yes, if that's what you mean."

"Or 'hard-boiled'?"

"Oh, heavens!" shuddered her mother.

"He was a tough guy," said Embert. "If you'll let me say so," he added deferentially, with a look at Catherine.

She seemed doubtful. But for his apologetic tone, she might have shuddered again. She merely said:

"I should think that Otho Janes might have *us* to lunch, some time."

"He will," replied Evelyn. "He will. There was a fat woman with pearls in her hair. I wonder what became of her?"

"Was there?" asked Embert. "I didn't notice."

"Well, anything but an endless panorama," said Evelyn. "We'll take an hour or two, before long," she promised her mother, "and see the whole thing through. There were some cupids above a canopy, with all the rest."

"Enough is enough," declared her mother. "It must be worse than the Spring Exhibition."

"We'll soon learn," said Evelyn, confidently. "Another cup?"

"Stop it!" said her mother.

No, never mind about the tea; never mind about

the tapestries. Here was Otho Janes entertaining this young man at his club. Could this young man be insignificant, unpromising? Well, if you asked her for her final, fully-considered opinion, possibly not.

XXIII

Embert and Claire

Catherine Trent and her daughter left the Penrhyn Arms (a name with no meaning whatever) convinced that it was an abode of quiet. Nobody encountered on entering; nobody encountered on leaving; no sounds to penetrate to the corridors through the innumerable doors.

"Admirable!" pronounced Catherine, from its front doorstep.

The house called itself an apartment hotel, but emphasis must go to the first word of the designation rather than to the second. The Arms had no dining-room, no restaurant, no lobby to speak of, and only a minimum of service. But it had a cosy sort of reception-room where, on evenings, half a dozen persons might sometimes be found, conversing or playing cards; and it had, in one obscure corner, a small cubby-hole where, in emergency, a parcel might be left, and where, if one's neighbours grew too obstreperous, one

might complain. With such maimed rites the place ran on. For the tumult, instead of being massed on the lower floor, as with Embert's previous hotel, was equably distributed throughout.

On an evening during the second week of his tenancy, Howell passed Robert Sherrill in one of the hotel's corridors. Sherrill was definitely approaching a particular doorway, and the movement of his hand suggested the coming production of a key-ring. Embert was on the right side of the hall-light for a shadowed face.

"H'm!" he said. "I hope that, after walking into his club, I haven't walked into his hotel!"

Other choice company passed along the same corridor shortly afterward, and paused at the same door; and the next morning the obscure cubby-hole on the ground floor had to listen, once again, to laments over high voices, high music, and high clashing of dishes, all at too late an hour.

Then, for a week or two, a hostess, judiciously cautioned, lived quietly and uneventfully. If the evening hours hung heavy on her hands she could descend to the reception room and, sitting in a corner, watch (for example) a quartette of young innocents struggling over bridge. . . .

It was on one of these occasions that Claire

Basquin came under the notice of Embert Howell. Compared with the girls near by, who simply would chatter, even over cards, she seemed quiet, decorous, poised, mature, reticent, a seasoned woman of the world.

Yes, Claire was giving, publicly, a demonstration of the possibilities of ladylike behaviour.

Embert did not let poise and sedateness add appreciably to her years. He gave no thought to age, either hers or his. She was interesting in her pensiveness, in her abstention from social assertiveness. Perhaps she, like himself, was new to the place.

Yes, a seasoned woman of the world, whom it might well be worth his while to know.

Why was Evelyn Trent, now and then, so brusque and cursory? Why so hortatory (we must supply him with this word) for one so young? A finished maturity—from which he could profit—seemed to beckon him on.

If Claire Basquin came under the notice of Embert Howell, no less did Embert Howell come under the notice of Claire Basquin.

"I have seen him before," she thought. "But where?"

She thought again. Why, at that bazaar! And

at the particular booth where the "client's daughter," carefully shepherded by her mother and her mother's friend, had trafficked in trifles and had drawn too much attention from the men.

Well, since Embert Howell desired to meet the silent, pensive, matured lady of the parlour; and since Claire Basquin more than desired to meet the youth who was on intimate terms with the women that interested her, and who had something of an acquaintance with Sherrill himself; and since a common ground for the meeting was readily accessible, no miracle was needed to bring about the rencontre. They met easily enough, and within a day or two Embert, still proud in the possession of his new car, had asked Mrs. Basquin to take a ride in it. She had thus a pleasant diversion for unoccupied hours and full opportunity to learn whatever she desired.

Did Embert talk? Well, one is not always silent about the chief figures in one's new circle. After her forty miles of crowded, odoriferous country roads, Claire Basquin knew the names, the neighbourhood, the associates and the general fortune of the people against whom—however unconsciously to them—she felt herself contending. And she found herself better prepared, at last,

for dealings with Sherrill, against whom she might have to contend even more seriously.

"A charming girl," said false Claire. "And her booth seemed popular."

Embert had his eye on a filling station.

"Yes, yes . . ."

"So many men! And one young fellow buying everything in sight."

Embert decided to pass the station.

"Yes, yes. A rich chap with plenty of money."

"And some nice-looking old chaps, too. Rich, as well?"

"There was one who helped us out considerably."

"Delightful occasion," said Claire. H'm! Some rich old gentleman had helped "us" out. Thanks for that.

"You were quite interested, too?" she went on.

"Oh yes. You like to have your friends come through."

"H'm!" thought Claire, again. How *much* interested? Deeply, she hoped.

A few cars whizzed by in the opposite direction. One contained a free party of stags. Embert thought of Sherrill, with his small group of intimates: his Rosencrantz, his Guildenstern, and

perhaps an Osric thrown in to complete the quartette. But four people, passing on rapid tires, are difficult to distinguish; more difficult than two.

Yes, how *much* interested? "Of course you are free to visit at her—at their—home?"

"They've been pretty kind to me." For the sake of compression, he was willing to bracket Catherine Trent with her daughter.

"And you're grateful. You do kindnesses in turn."

"Not all that I might, I'm afraid." Fewer questions; fewer questions. He was asking none himself.

At the end of this excursion Embert began to feel that a static companion in the hotel parlour was preferable to a kinetic companion in his car. She had squirmed, mentally and physically. If she had to show herself so interrogatory, she might have asked him more directly about himself—a young man's darling subject—and he should have had various triumphs to report; but as he had made no inquiries of her, perhaps he might take her restraint for a point in good manners. However, he could not but notice differences in tone and texture between Mrs. Basquin on the one hand and some other recent friends and

acquaintances of his on the other. Was her hair too yellow? Were her rings too showy? Were her finger-nails too rosy? And was her range of thought, as indicated by a face at once plump and a trifle flabby, too narrow? Well, like her completely or not, she at least made a consistent composition; and such, he judged, was—within set limits—an achievement. Yes, undoubtedly a woman of the world—one of the few he had been privileged to meet.

A few days later, Howell received a note from Evelyn Trent, whom he had not seen for a fortnight. She asked him, in her mother's name, to a small dinner. Friends had returned from their winter sojourn in the South—people whom he might like to meet; and she added, for good measure, that Mr. Janes could be included as well as not. "And even dear Aunty McEye," she also added, facetiously, "if anybody insists."

But Embert had that disastrous, or welcome, thing known as a "previous engagement"—in this case perhaps less welcome than otherwise. It was an engagement of several days' standing, and it was an engagement to accompany Mrs. Basquin to the theatre. She had adjusted other arrangements to harmonize with this one, for she

prized an evening of drama—being commonly under stress, as has been explained before, of doing her laughing, sobbing, and nibbling at matinées.

Embert had allowed her to suggest the entertainment she preferred, and she had chosen a sort of revue that was expensive beyond its subject-matter and none too decorous from the standpoint of organized and self-respecting society.

Claire gave herself up whole-heartedly to the "show"—a display of this and that which deserves no better name. Her laughter was overlaid by the laughter of the general crowd; still, she saw some of the dubious jokes too quickly and registered her responses like a sharp, naughty child. Some quieter people near her were far from following her lead, and Embert, at times, felt discomfort. If he were below the level of Evelyn Trent's appreciation, Claire Basquin was far below the level of his. He might not be up to Ibsen and Pirandello, yet he felt himself a few shades above show-girls and "comedians."

"Grand show, wasn't it!" said Claire, on the way home.

Well, he had lost a few people that it might have been an advantage to meet, and he had passed three

hours in front of a dancing, marching, posing, leering crowd that it would have been a good thing to miss. Shimmering off-colour—like the "rotten mackerel" he recalled from a book of literary anecdotes.

"Yes, indeed," he responded. The best feature of the evening was the fact that he should have to take no extra steps to escort his companion home.

XXIV

Embert's Lapse from Grace

The small dinner at the Trents' left Evelyn rather pettish. The Parrishes, those wealthy winter sojourners in the South, may not have brought back much money from Florida, but they were returning to plenty of it in town; and Evelyn had decided that the husband and father could have no reason for disliking a young bond salesman who, while quietly persistent and undeniably progressing, was at the same time modest and generally pleasant. The chief point was that the two should meet, after which Embert Howell, with some certainty, would bring still another scalp to gratified employers. But Embert was absent; and who knew where?

Considering the present state of things, Evelyn saw no great reason for summoning Mr. Janes; if she wanted to extract from him a lunch at his club for her mother and herself, the matter might be arranged elsewhere and otherwise. Nor did she

invite Anastasia McIntyre; that suggestion had been only a piece of waggishness. And as it turned out, Mrs. McIntyre, like Embert himself, was engaged elsewhere.

In the absence of Embert, Jack Milburn was invited to take his place. Milburn, by some miracle, had a free evening, and he was willing to attend. He hoped that such complaisance would be appreciated.

It was not appreciated by old Peter, who, in his coat of state (he almost needed a new one), had things in hand. As a connoisseur of young men, he thought that Mr. Milburn carried informal assurance, at table, a little too far. On one occasion at least the young man's plate was removed with nothing less than a snatch. Catherine Trent glared from the head of the table. "Peter," her frown seemed to say, "what do you mean? How dare you!"—with other brief, indignant coinages of an alert brain. But Peter, like the rest of us, demanded self-expression, and naturally he expressed himself in the exercise of his *métier*. "How I shall talk to that self-willed old fellow in the morning!" was her strong internal resolve. But, somehow, she didn't.

Milburn talked *de haut en bas* to little Miss

Parrish, who had barely reached the dining age; and when he found her too young he kindly accepted Evelyn as an adult. Back in the pantry, Peter was asking the maid, "Where is that other young man?"—all as if somebody ought to know, and as if his substitution for the young man present would have been welcome. Where the other young man had been was explained, two days later, at lunch.

Mrs. McIntyre was occupying her familiar place at table. And she had been to the theatre night before last. A kind gentleman had quite unexpectedly invited her. "A young gentleman, too—really not over forty," she declared. And she went on to say that the light, frivolous performance was one for youth—"though, of course, I enjoyed parts of it, too, even if other parts were too free. But, then, I'm old and hardened; and such things as are now done and said on the stage . . .!"

"Are they?" asked Evelyn. "I never see them nor hear them, though I sometimes notice complaints in print."

"I hope we are not rebuking Aunt Anastasia," observed Catherine Trent, with uplifted eyebrows.

"I can rebuke myself," returned Anastasia, "and in some places I had to. But I suppose that most of the people who were there knew what they were going to get."

"I'm afraid so," said Evelyn.

"And, by the way, Mr. Howell was there. Yes; he sat two or three rows ahead of me, and I saw him later, as we came out."

"Oh, was he?" A lapse, this, for a man whom she had tried to raise to the level of a highbrow. "Did he laugh?" she inquired further.

"Not much. That was done—oh, wasn't it!—by the woman alongside."

"With him?"

"Yes. They came out together."

"Oh? Perhaps the girl who was teaching him, a while ago, to dance."

"Girl? Hardly. I don't at all know who she was, but she seemed old enough to be—"

"His mother?" asked Evelyn, with a touch of tartness.

"No, no. Old enough to be his older sister," was Anastasia's temperate reply. "Thirty or so."

"A lady?"

"Oh, really, now!" returned Anastasia, with a mass of implication. "As I say," she went on, "I

didn't know her in the least. Not in society, I think. And I doubt if she could make—how do those slangy boys say it?—I doubt if she could make the grade."

Catherine Trent looked closely at both. "There!" she was saying, in very large letters.

"And Mr. Howell, in the lobby—I'll say this for him—looked rather . . . Oh, dear me! just what do I mean? Not mortified. Not quite abashed. Not *bouleversé* . . . Goodness! where are all the words, to-day? Well, I hope you know what I mean . . ."

"I hope so," said Evelyn, to the hope of Peter, who had just come in to pass the pudding. And Catherine Trent reduced the size of her letters by a font or two.

Luncheon once over, Evelyn went up to her bedroom for a complete rearrangement, or disarrangement, of her top bureau drawer.

H'm! And, again, H'm! Embert Howell, whom she had hoped to finish, while incidentally finishing herself. How was he coming on? How was he going to turn out? Was he flying the track? Was he falling to a lower level?

That woman of thirty, who was not expected to make the grade. A woman of the town rather

than of the country, Mrs. McIntyre had implied. No, not a woman of the town, which had a different connotation. A city woman—some new acquaintance—as distinguished from a rustic visitor who was to be entertained as an outsider.

Evelyn threw out several handkerchiefs, and then threw them back. Then she shifted them from one end of the drawer to the other.

Teas, dinners, receptions, bazaars, pictures, opera, and what all besides. Those civilizing, refining influences. And now!—a tawdry "show" in cheap company.

Collars. Ribbons. Scarves.

Dear, hospitable Mrs. Corwin. Kind, friendly Otho Janes, who had done so much. Her own distinguished, if severe, mother. Even absurd, almost superfluous Aunty McEye. The dear, good ladies at the professional club. The dear, good, if slightly more stately and exacting, ladies at the art reception . . .

Evelyn left her bureau drawers and concentrated on the top of the thing itself. She remembered the sacrifice of the pink, enamelled powder-puff, symbol of the distasteful and rejected Sherrill. What else was there here to sacrifice? Well, here was a pin-cushion, as full of pins and needles as a

hedge of thorns. Here was a nail-file, which could rasp with the best. Here was a bottle labelled "Bloom of Youth"—if youth was longer a joy. Here was a clothes-brush with a pink-ribbon bow on it, and it could doubtless brush the wrong way as well as the right . . .

Vulgar, unworthy woman! Of course she was all of that, and more. Where had he ever met her? How much did he care for her? Who had made the first advances?—she, no doubt. Where did she live? Who were her other—? No; who—more simply—were her friends? . . .

Evelyn left her dresser and approached her bed. Two large, soft pillows.

"But I shall certainly do nothing of the kind!" she declared to herself. "It's far too early. It isn't half serious enough. I shall soon learn the why and wherefore of it all. Me, as a broken-hearted maid? I should say not!"

However, being by the bed, she picked up one of the pillows, gave it a good, sound shake, and put it back in place. It was as if some member of a temporarily deranged social economy had been taken in hand, well agitated for his own good, and then reinstated in the scheme to which he rightly should belong.

Then, though she returned to the dresser, and again looked over the things on the top of it, she left the pin-cushion, the nail-file, the beribboned clothes-brush and the "Bloom of Youth" to remain where they were.

XXV

Contest

Spring was making itself felt through Embert's club. Especially in the gymnasium, where chests were expanding and muscles were flexing, with pulley-weights, trapezes and parallel bars all in active use. Everybody was busy, save the many members who would rather have died than have undertaken systematic exercise. For them, card-room and private stock.

Embert bore his part. He took his full share in the use of apparatus, and was knocked about, discreetly, by a professor who found him short in temper. Perhaps he bore a little more than his part; for after a taxing day at the office further work in the late afternoon or the evening would send him early to bed. More than once he had found himself dozing, in the club library, over the illustrated papers.

Sherrill, too, was active on the boxing-floor. Embert could impartially admire his physique

from the doorway, and then postpone his own bouts with the instructor until another time. Sherrill, robust, deep-chested, hirsute, well-muscled, had his following of admirers. Nobody stopped to admire Embert Howell among the bars, the swinging rings and the vaulting poles, and he was just as well pleased. When the "Ladies' night," now and then talked of, came to be held, he should leave the pomps and vanities of the world athletic to the club's best-known stars.

One evening, he was alone at his ease, for a few moments, in the reception-room of his hotel. No party playing bridge; no studious exhibit of subdued deportment. A man paused in the doorway, looked about the room, and then entered. It was Sherrill.

Again? thought Embert. What was he here for, now?

Sherrill was glowering and surly. As he advanced he became still more so.

"See here," he said truculently, "I've had about enough of you, and there'll be no better chance to tell you. Wherever I go, you're under my feet—at receptions, at church-fairs; and I can't even take a spin in the country without passing you on the way."

A violent opening, for which Embert, non-controversial by nature, was unprepared.

"I want you to keep off!" declared Sherrill, with a chestnut flush spreading down from his chestnut hair.

Controversy is a linked chain. It is always helped when one can start from his opponent's last word.

"Off what?" asked Embert, rather slowly. "Off the public roads? Off the earth?" he added, gaining momentum and confidence.

"Off anything you like," retorted Sherrill, still worrying the word. "You'll drop the woman you were with, that Sunday."

So this explained the fellow's occasional appearance in the house. He was proprietary, egotistically possessive. Embert wondered, wondered . . . A light broke. The light grew. She was the sort of woman a Sherrill would associate with. No harsher term came to the surface.

"Drop? I think it likely."

"You'll make it certain."

"Certain, then. But the difference is not between you and me. It's between you and your Mrs. Basquin, I think."

"Throwing it on a woman!"

"If you have any rights there," proceeded Embert, steadily, "she knew it better than I. And she knew it sooner. I've never known till now. Arrange it between you."

Other words to enter the chain: "know" and "now."

"You know, now, when you're told."

"I know now—and am glad to be out of it. The road is yours. Travel it at your pleasure."

Sherrill stepped back. Then he came forward again.

"There's one thing more. You're interfering with other friends of mine."

Embert stared. "You want everything?" he said. "You want the earth, true enough. You're asking too much."

Sherrill clenched his fists and the muscles tautened within his coat-sleeves. Embert felt his lesser fists and lesser muscles stirring, too.

"I'll soon dispose of *you!*" Sherrill declared, with angry contempt.

Just then a dark, bulky, middle-aged figure appeared in the doorway. He was the care-ridden man who was sometimes to be found, during the absence of a clerk, in the small office near by.

"What is this?" he inquired, looking at both

men. Sherrill saw that he was in authority. "Mr. Howell?" the man continued inquiringly.

"Some one from outside," returned Embert. "Inclined to be disorderly."

"We must have order here," said the bulky man, distinctly.

"What do I care about your order—" began Sherrill, in heated tones.

"I don't recognize you," said the man slowly and ponderously, "except as—as an occasional caller."

"You don't recognize me except as—?"

"Mr. Howell is a tenant here; a quiet man who pays rent—"

"And do you think that *I* don't—?" began Sherrill, savagely. Then he was discreet enough to stop.

"Noise in private rooms," said the dark, bulky man, implacably, "is bad enough. Noise in public rooms—I must ask you to go."

"Go? Do you understand—?"

"You will go," said the man, evenly. Others had probably gone, to the same even tones. He put a finger on the nearest button by the door-jamb.

Sherrill gave Howell a black look and the manager another, and stalked out.

Embert had really been angry, at last, and more than disposed to let his anger work. But here was a man who hung the label "Quiet" about his neck and called for peace on his own premises.

Embert started up to his apartment with a finger thoughtfully on his nose. Well, he had come through a scene. He put it all down to experience and felt himself more of a man. If there was no éclat on one side of his ledger, there was no discredit on the other. He also meditated on the probability of a tense hour in Claire Basquin's rooms preceding Sherrill's inflamed descent. Well, again, it was about over. Claire had got from him, as he came presently to know, all that she wanted; and he had got through her rather more than he wanted. The relation might end. He had never seen her apartment, but he wondered how long she would go on occupying it. That might depend on Sherrill, or it might depend on the quiet, heavy man whose appearance had prevented a possible fracas.

When Ladies' night finally came round Embert took no obligations on himself. He knew few ladies, and he did not know how these few would accept such an entertainment. In fact, he did not at all know what this assemblage, the first of the

kind during his membership, might offer. Ladies, as he gathered from various quarters, were now more openly active in the appreciation and encouragement of masculine prowess; but he could not tell just how far the encouragement and the prowess might go. Perhaps only as far as a bit of refined sparring, with but a minimum of black eyes, bloody noses and heavy thumps on a hard floor. Perhaps, on the other hand, the gentlemen might forget, temporarily, that they were gentlemen and the ladies that they were ladies; in which case the human animal, of whichever sex, might disclose itself in all its native lack of attractiveness . . .

Well, Embert, after an exacting day at the office and a possible excess of exercise in the gymnasium, decided to take dinner at the club itself and to spend an hour in the quietude of the club's library. As a preparation for the evening's activities he might even do a little reading in the papers devoted to sport . . .

Embert presently looked up from "Sporting Life" to realize that he had been drafted for the coming performance. Somebody in charge of the pairings, or concerned over a hitch that required re-pairings, had come to advise him that the

organization now required his loyal help. Oh, very well, if he must! The golfers and the polo-players faded away from the printed page. Trunks took their place, and gloves, and the prospect of a badly battered face full in the eyes of a crowd ranged closely around him.

That crowd! That dismaying mass patterned out of varied countenances! Yet all of them, sympathetic or unsympathetic, called for one thing—action. Little heed where the blows fell if only they fell thick and fast enough and laid somebody, decisively, on the floor. "Bravo, torero!" and "Bravo, bull!"—as they cried impartially at Madrid (so he had read) on Easter Sunday.

Any ladies? This was their "night." Looking about, he saw but one. Was she to be taken as the presiding goddess or the evil spirit of the scene? She was a blonde woman with pearls festooned through her hair. Sometimes she was in the front row, sometimes up in the balcony. She floated here and there as a portent. What a queen of the tournament, if she would but keep to one spot, her dais! Then she could award, in due form, the prize. He trusted that the prize, as was usual in fairy-tales, would not be the princess herself.

But, more importantly, who was his opponent,

the man against whom some obscure yet authorized power had pitted him? He looked across to the other corner of the roped enclosure. Sherrill! Sherrill in a crimson belt. He looked down at his own. It was blue. Then Sherrill, twice as big, twice as muscular, and twice as fiercely ugly, jumped from his corner and rushed toward him. Who could be to blame for this most uneven, most preposterously unfair match?

Convention requires that the young hero shall lose the first round, and the second, and sometimes even the third. He must be battered; he must be crowded against the ropes and hurled down on the floor; his hair and even his countenance must become badly deranged. So it was with poor, dizzy, fainting Embert; and soon he sat limp in his corner, fanned with a towel by some utter stranger.

What! Another lady present! This beautiful, sympathetic girl, the one to whom he already owed innumerable kindnesses—how had she contrived to steal down through all those serried ranks of hard, eager men to lay a slender hand on his weakening arm and to wish him well? Of course our Embert sprang to his feet at once and rushed forward determined to win. Who would have failed to?

The scene changed. This life-and-death struggle demanded a larger arena and a vaster audience. Stone seats, then, by myriads; stone colonnades towering on high, all harbouring a hundred thousand people. Over the two contending figures a battery, arranged by rank and file, of forty-odd electric lights. We are conspicuous, truly; yet when we magnify our little affairs to a bulk in correspondence with their immediate consequence, what stage is too vast, what assemblage too great? Here, as before, we are buffeted about, and no dear girl comes through the enormous throng to brace us, with a hand-clasp, against the next assault. The man in crimson delivers another body-blow, and the man in blue drops as he has dropped before.

When we come to, we find ourself in yet another environment. A beautiful pastoral landscape—if we only had time to enjoy it. A choice garden, it should seem, with lilac-clumps and arbor vitae hedges. This time our platform, ropes and all, is set between a veranda and a bathing-pool. There is a striped tent for refreshments. In the throng are dozens of ladies clad in light summer-afternoon finery—let us hope that lace parasols will not cut off too many eyes from

our spectacle. Ah! we are regaining wind and confidence. A ring of pleasant faces, hoping for our success. One terrible, final blow. The man in the crimson belt lies at our feet. He continues to lie there after the consecrated "Ten!" We turn round for the referee who is to hold our victorious fist aloft. His touch is on our shoulder . . .

The referee is uniformed in dark green, with broad, plain brass buttons; and he looks at us not with the eyes of admiration, but with the eyes of paid-for respect, as he picks up the paper that has slipped from our knees.

"Beg pardon, sir, but it is late, and the room is about to close."

XXVI

George Is Sudden

Sherrill had come out well enough from the mix-up through which Embert Howell had slept. He had held his own, and better, with a worthy opponent, and his rubbing-down had restored him to prime condition. His body was uninjured. His real bruises were otherwhere and otherwise.

That distasteful scene on that lower floor! Branded as disorderly by a young cub, and told to leave the place! Howell "paid his rent"! Who could say that he himself, through what indirect channels, did not do the same? More; he had done so in the early, uncertain days of the venture, when the owners had felt their success in doubt. And now, when the place was full and success assured, a high-and-mighty, hypocritical tone could be taken. Enough to make a man sick!

That still more unpleasant scene on an upper floor! Claire Basquin now had chapter and verse, name and number, and she was fully aware of his secret preferences and ambitions.

"Make your choice!" she had said, with a more decided temper and a more strident tone than she had ventured to employ before.

He had looked at her with ironical disparagement.

"*Is* there a choice?"

Then she had set aside any possible pride, and even any possible self-esteem, and had surveyed him with a cold insolence.

"There is not!"

A taunt. A jagged piece of embittered comment that was even more at his expense than at her own. She had confined him within a limited, lower field and had challenged his power to escape it.

In ugly mood, Sherrill left his town offices for an hour or two at the suburban venture. Should he give up at once the woman's quarters and the woman herself? There were other opportunities, other consolations, other satisfying adventures . . .

A pleasant Saturday afternoon. The sun bright, and the trees in their freshest green. More streets and roads paved; ditches extended farther; a few more nondescript bungalows and Californian cottages. "Prospects" in the office, looking over blue prints; other prospects out on the disordered

acres, looking over lots and sites. The office itself filled, as usual, with salesmen, clerks and stenographers. All in anticipation of the morrow. Almost a substitute for it, in fact. Among the desks of the stenographers and typewriters one desk, temporarily vacant.

The delinquent was perceived, through an open front window, upon the rustic English porch that had seemed a tasteful adornment for the façade of the building. Yes, Cora Graves in her eighteen years of good looks, good dispositon, high hopes and continuing ingenuousness.

Those overtures at the dance-hall. Whatever view may have been taken of them by the other man, they had been conducted under the stipulated forms; and disrespect, if to be acknowledged, had merely been tossed over his shoulder toward his grinning cronies. There was really nothing to prejudice an attempt at re-established relations.

This attractive young person, it seemed, had stepped out on the porch to say good-bye to some customer; or to some caller? Arms were waved on both sides, and smiles exchanged, as the young fellow, who might be nineteen or so, however solid, passed down the fifty feet of concrete walk to a waiting car. The car was of many colours, and

appeared, by more tokens than one, to be connected with the automobile trade.

Yes, it was George Howell, who had run out to see how his "best girl"—his, now, rather than his brother's—was getting along on the far edge of things.

Sherrill, who had been lounging through the office, rather informally, raised his hat and prepared, with a made-up smile, for a few apposite words. Among the multiplicity of helpers he had never before noticed this one, though pleased enough to have found her here at last. Cora Graves received his salutation with some distaste and with a touch of apprehension. She looked toward George Howell, who was just about to enter his car. Sherrill, right here, thought it fitting, after his smile and his words, to aid the girl's return to work by laying a hand on her arm. His hand aimed so high as to take in her shoulder, and almost her back.

George saw this. He figured a man of fashion and experience who was overstepping the bounds —bounds that George himself had set. From his standpoint, Cora was less addressed than accosted. The look of embarrassment that she cast about —though no one else, for the moment, was

immediately in sight—confirmed the notion. Yes; an irresponsible person from town who was adding to the interest of a half-holiday by trifling with a good, nice girl—his girl.

George slammed the half-open door of the car and came back up the walk.

"Hands off!" he called, a little too peremptorily.

Sherrill frowned. A yapping puppy ordering a man off his own doorstep!

"Another cur under my feet!" he snarled. His run of thoughts, on the way out, had made snarling easy.

George lunged forward with a pair of massive shoulders.

"Oh, George, George," cried Cora. "It's nothing. It's all right."

"Under your feet?" shouted George. "Then your feet are in the wrong place. Move them!"

His feet in the wrong place! "Get out!" ordered Sherrill.

"Don't, George!" pleaded Cora. She turned to Sherrill. "I'm sure Mr. Howell will mean nothing at all when he understands. Don't, George"; for two or three problematical people were approaching.

"Howell"? Another of the tribe! Sherrill bared

his teeth and felt a command from his arms. "I tell you to go," he said.

"I tell *you* to go," countered stout George.

One or two questioning faces at the nearest window. One or two possible "prospects" approaching from the road.

Sherrill stepped forward, with all his science. This young whelp, now doubly obnoxious, must be crushed.

One often wonders what might happen to the expert boxer, or even to the seasoned pugilist, if taken more or less unaware and quite out of his own field. The established rules and conventions suddenly upset. A rough-and-tumble tussle, stripped of referee, bell, counts, and of an exact system of marks and calculations. Indeed, the results have been encountered, more than once, even under the rules, when rude vigour from the Pampas or the Pyrenees has met and overborne famous and admired champions working under a system of nicely adjusted artificialities. . . .

Well, it was a case of rude vigour with George Howell, operating beyond any exactly-formulated set of rules. He had never boxed elegantly for ladies; but he had a big, strong body, a hot heart, and a keen consciousness of affronted young

manhood. George, then, without pause to view and weigh the various factors of the situation, sailed in.

The English porch was four or five steps above the ground-level, and continued as a short open terrace for a few feet right and left. Fortunately, for Sherrill. After picking himself up from the earth, to which a well-planted, decisive blow had sent him, he was able to make a plausible explanation to his associates within. He withdrew from the small crowd assembling outside and said, as jauntily as he could, on the other side of the door:

"Brush with some wild boy. My foot slipped." Nothing at all derogatory to him had happened, of course; but he should try to remember that this wild boy might be Embert Howell's brother.

Two ditch-diggers passed along the edge of the sudden little company.

"Fight about a girl," said one of them, easily.

"Looks so," replied the other.

Meanwhile, here was the doe, with doe-like eyes, after the stags had parted.

"Oh, George!" she said; "he belongs here. I work for him."

George was a bit dashed.

"I'm afraid I've lost my place," simple Cora went on.

George recovered himself. "Well, suppose you have? There are better. You sha'n't stay near him."

Now, then. When Perseus has rescued Andromeda does he tell her to signal the earliest ship? When Agamemnon has possessed himself of Cassandra does he suggest that she take the next chariot? When Ruggiero has salvaged Angelica does he recommend her to catch the first passing hippogriff?

"Come on," said George, pointing to the car.

"Oh, George! Where are we going?"

"You'll soon know," returned this commanding male. "You're eighteen, and I'm twenty-one."

"Oh, George! Are you, really?"

"See here," he protested. "Say 'Oh, George!' again, and I leave you flat."

Cora, within the past few months, had learned to say "Oh, George!" with a wide variety of intonations. However, one still remained.

She placed her carefully waved head on his big shoulder and said, again:

"Oh, George!"

XXVII

Catherine Trent Opens her House

Sherrill had not fallen more than four feet, as the result of his "slip," but he felt, psychically, as if he had fallen four hundred. Everything awry. Some impudent boy had run off with one woman, and he himself was close to the point where he was inclined to shunt another. Enough of make-shifts and stop-gaps. Time, now, for a regularized union, and a claim on such place in the world as it should prepare.

Catherine Trent received Sherrill's approaches with equanimity, and even with favour. That he should have spoken to her first—why, it was like a revival of chivalry from some old-time day. Some strong original predilection must have survived in great vigour if she could shed the glamour of chivalry over a man like Sherrill.

She still saw little or nothing in the possibility of a definite understanding between her daughter and the young man whom that daughter, for some

months past, had been cultivating. He was moving along, true, and might soon be prepared for married life; but Catherine Trent detected little in the present state of things save a tepid amiability on both sides. It was all like a smouldering fire that filled the mild air with thin smoke, but never broke into a blaze. An insubstantial vapour that had even begun to annoy her.

This vapour seemed, lately, to have become even thinner. Anastasia McIntyre's report about Embert Howell's public attendance on a third-rate woman had thinned the haze to some extent; and his failure to invite social benefactors to an entertainment which obviously offered an easy and natural means of acknowledging obligations had made the haze still thinner. Not that the occasion, as pictured by Jack Milburn, would have been everything they could have welcomed. Meanwhile, Evelyn was going about, rather ostentatiously, with Milburn himself, for whom she did not, and could not, care a rap.

It was impossible, as things had now come to stand between Catherine Trent and Robert Sherrill, to consider domestic matters without bringing in business considerations as well. Mrs. Trent, as a seasoned woman of the world, found no

objection to this; in fact, she felt a strong need for doing so. She was feeling more than ever the pinch of "embarrassed circumstances." Some investments had gone awry, whether temporarily or for good and all. Household expenses had to be considered more closely—one or two servants were to be dismissed, and charges at the big shops had to be watched with a more careful eye. "Let me know what you are buying," she had said more than once to Evelyn.

But worst of all, Sherrill had urged her, induced her, almost forced her, in his prepotent fashion, to put more into his suburban enterprise than she had felt right or safe.

"I can make it so," he now said sharply, and with a full charge of intent. "I *can*, I say. I am on the inside." Her investment in so much unproductive land need not leave her where it had left some of the smaller fry among those many heedless buyers, and where it was likely to leave many more. He gave her, just here, a fine example of wrist-play. Some legerdemain of which he, on the inside, was amply capable, might place her present holdings in a better light, or offer an escape from them altogether. He did not go on, however, to say that he should certainly do all

this, and it became apparent to her that it was as a mother rather than as an investor that she was primarily addressed. Her daughter might help to bring good money out of bad.

It cannot be said that Catherine Trent was over-pleased with the terms of this proposal, which was not too delicately veiled; but she felt the advantage of a strong prop under her house, and she promised some preliminary words with her daughter.

Evelyn, when the matter came to be broached, was in front of her dresser—that article of furniture which, at different times and through so many moods, had seen such a shifting of toilet accessories. Thanks to her mirror, she had as clear a view of her own face as her mother had. Both perceived that she was registering, as we say in these days, extreme distaste and aversion.

"He knows I've always disliked him!" she broke out. "Yesterday, it was only dislike. To-day, I detest him."

How, she went on, could a man who knew that he was disliked, and who was certain to stay so, care to enter into such a relationship as marriage?

"I could understand," she went on, "if it were a question of a horse, or a billiard-table, or a

motor-car. He could sell any of those, or give them away. But—" She turned her back in repugnance to the whole idea. She hated Sherrill, and she began to dislike her mother.

Catherine Trent, looking back on her days as a bride, took matters reasonably. Her hearty young countryman had indeed been exigent, proprietary, prodded by the urge of immediacy. Possession; possession! the quick exercise of his own will; and the rest to follow as it might! Things, after adjustment, had turned out well enough. She had not, through the following years, been a chattel. She had not been dropped, sold, traded . . .

Evelyn now set aside Sherrill's proposal and put her thoughts on family affairs.

"If things are going wrong," she submitted, "let's take some advice. Let's have a lawyer. I'll go myself. I'll see Mr. Janes."

"Well, I hope not!" replied her mother. "I don't quite see two captains—one at each end of the ship!"

Left alone, Evelyn's thoughts turned toward Embert Howell. Heigh-ho! Not too forceful; lately, rather inattentive. She could conceive herself as impatient with him at times, but never indignant, never distressed, never affronted. Life

would never be inflammatory, nor festering, nor repugnant.

Catherine Trent decided to let the matter lie for a while, though she probably realized that it was laid out for once and all. Who knew but that, a year ahead, her house might be but a loose pile of old bricks and twisted pipes, while some young man would be working over blue prints on some new conception for some new, unknown people? . . .

Meanwhile, let the drums roll and the flags fly. She meant to seem important for a little longer. The simplest way to seem important—provided one can carry the thing off—is to "open one's house." She should open hers, and all who had the price might enter. There would be a few of her old-time friends; there would be others, in greater numbers, from the new, aspiring set; and perhaps an even larger number from the wide field of hankering outsiders. Each should pay her five dollars, and learn afterward what there was to see, if anything.

Next, the occasion; one might even say, the pretext. Catherine Trent ran over the list of associations and organizations that she belonged to, or had belonged to. It must be some society or other

that would have an aspect properly philanthropic and that would be willing to take upon itself the matter of light refreshments. "For the benefit of—" sounded correct; and the tea-table, set out in her sombre old dining-room, or in her still more sombre old library, would help stave off any accusation of an unbaited hook. People might not get their full money's worth, but they would get something; and the orphaned, or the tuberculous, or whoever, might be advantaged by five or six hundred dollars.

It was on such days that Anastasia McIntyre shone in all her lustre. She was not only present; she was omnipresent. She held herself more than ever ready to draw the line between the "ins" and the "outs." Not even charity could restrain her.

Mrs. Trent's benevolent intentions had found their way into the society columns of the daily press, and many of the "outs" saw their opportunity.

"Do you think, George," Cora Howell asked her husband—hers after a procedure a little less precipitate than he had imaged—"do you think you could spare me that five?"

"I think not," returned George, with prompti-

tude. "Wait a little and you may see it all for nothing. You have a brother-in-law who—"

"Oh, George! do you think so?"

"Hush!" said George.

Embert had welcomed his new relative in the friendliest spirit. He was well enough pleased, and she was more than pleased. George was moving along confidently and successfully in his chosen field, and his wife was in full consonance with him. What more, viewing things broadly, could the man of attentions without intentions ask for?

Another of the "outs," a woman older than Cora and much more circumspect than Cora would have needed to be, had found, more successfully, the means to purchase an admission card. She roamed the rooms discreetly, while trying to look at a number of out-of-date paintings that were better ignored; but she was much less preoccupied with the house than with the members of the family that inhabited it. There was Evelyn, for example, at one of the tables, and there was her mother who looked in and out through various doorways on her odd assembly. This visitant, this observer, seemed more concerned with the mother than with the daughter. Catherine noticed her keen glance down one of

the long halls and caught her more than perceptive eyes fastened upon herself through more than one of the wide open doorways. At a certain moment—it was in a small, unfrequented room—the woman seemed about to accost her.

Catherine's nerves began to respond. "Anastasia," she whispered to Mrs. McIntyre, as she snatched her old crony and confidante into a shadowy alcove; "you know everybody and everything—almost. Who *is* that woman?"

Anastasia did not fail. She could tell—and did so. She knew society; and now, as it appeared, she knew even non-society.

"Why," she replied, "that's the one I saw at the theatre with young Howell."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Catherine.

In the course of time Claire Basquin, deferential yet determined, did succeed in waylaying the day's hostess. Two or three of the Art Museum ladies were in a corner of the room, but Claire's low and anxious tones did not reach them.

Yes, she stated, she was Mrs. Basquin, a friend of Mr. Sherrill's. She had heard . . .

Catherine grew grim.

She heard that Mr. Sherrill was paying his addresses . . .

"Oh, what a mincing, meeching, artificial way to talk!" thought Catherine. "It doesn't go with rouge and bleached hair and lip-sticks; or does it?"

Was paying his addresses to Miss Trent. But she herself had claims of the most serious nature on Mr. Sherrill. Could it really be true, then, that Mr. Sherrill—all this with great earnestness and anxiety under her ill-judged get-up—was meaning to marry . . .

"He is not!" said Catherine.

Relief for the intruder. To be followed, for good measure, by a touch of self-conscious courtesy. Mrs. Basquin looked through a suite of rooms to the place where Evelyn was still pouring. Charming girl! Might she not, as a well-wisher (a bold throw, but she had nothing to lose now, and should soon be leaving)—might she not congratulate Mr. Howell, also a friend, on—

"You may not!" said Catherine.

Claire Basquin went away presently, well rewarded for her expenditure, if these brief bits of information were to be accepted as authentic; and Catherine Trent, as soon as she could, threw herself on the sympathetic breast of Anastasia.

Such a girl! she half moaned, half muttered. What could be done for her? How was she to be

settled in life? Two suitors, yet both of them preoccupied with a creature who . . .

Catherine sighed, and almost determined to go to her room and let the rest of the afternoon take care of itself.

With the departure of the last of the tiresome crowd, she found she had devoted her daughter to everlasting spinsterhood.

XXVIII

A Matter Closed

By the time the robins have made their readjustment to parks and pavements, and the cheerful, hasty, yellow forsythia has caught up with itself, conditions loudly call the car-owner toward the country.

"Why, yes," said Evelyn. "Glad to go out with you, I'm sure. Anywhere except to Cordovan Gables."

"We'll go in the opposite direction," replied Embert. "I've left the Gables to George. Unless he has left them to themselves."

George's double exploit on Sherrill's suburban acres was now known to both. George had continued by installing Cora in a small apartment not too far from his centre of interest; and Evelyn, on one or two occasions, had met the pair. She found Cora a nice enough girl, who would lead a city life rather different from her own; and she thought George the suddenest and most decisive ever. Was he indeed Embert's brother?

"He really knows so little," commented Embert. "He just dashes in and slides along."

"Yes, very little," said Evelyn, in assent.

She thought of Embert's brief but picturesque association with Claire Basquin and wondered how much he himself might "know." She even wondered if his dip into a new and curious circle was to teach him anything further.

This association, as far as it had gone, was now satisfactorily cleared up. Embert had spoken out honestly; and Evelyn, though she had bantered him a bit, and had even professed a slight sense of injury and neglect, was ready enough to believe him: no, he had been without desire to stray into improper paths or to trespass on the known possessions of another. But he seemed to need, for his own use and good, something beside the simple, elementary social usages to which she had habituated him. It was hardly enough to meet "nice" people on their own nice ground.

Such thoughts, and related ones, as the car whizzed along. An opportune sprinkle had made the fresh greens fresher still; asphalt and concrete alike shone from the recent wetness; and a breeze, surviving from the shower, competed handsomely with the highway's drifting fumes of gasoline.

It is quite possible that Embert, aided by wind and weather and the noble example of his brother, would have perceived himself as on the farthest verge of a love-idyl, if there had not been so many things to distract his attention. There was his own wheel; there was the press of traffic, with all sorts of aids and hindrances to add their complications; there were the grosser forms of refreshment known as "barbecues"; and, above all, the multitudinous filling-stations, with their metallic clamour in reds and yellows, to tell of their readiness to spread petrol over a thirsty world.

The best calculations sometimes fail, and Embert, studying the situation and the distance involved in the return-trip, thought he might well take on five gallons more. A youth in grey produced something from a hideous orange pump, and just as Embert was starting up slowly another car drove in as slowly on the opposite roadway. This time it was possible for Embert to take in the composition of the party. First, Sherrill . . .

"H'm!" said Evelyn, looking away after a quick glance, "we side-stepped those Gables to great advantage!"

Second, another male: the Rosencrantz or the Guildenstern whose grinning countenance had

annoyed Embert at the dance-hall and had flitted uneasily through the boxing-match that he had fought so spiritedly from the sofa of the club library.

Third, two women whom neither he nor Evelyn had ever seen before.

Sherrill affected not to see Evelyn, but he gave Howell a surly scowl. Embert did not realize that the other was charging him, savagely, with three interferences, possibly with three disasters. He could not guess where Mrs. Basquin might be spending her afternoon. He did not know what George and his bride were doing with the same time. And he did not understand that a combination of social and business considerations had served to remove his present companion from Sherrill's reach. Nor did he fully realize that she was within his own.

The brief encounter with Sherrill had made Evelyn restless. She looked over the road, before and behind. An almost unbroken succession of automobiles that enjoyed only one another's fragrance. Habituated couples. Happy families (with many small children) which represented love-passages well over, rather than under way, or about to begin. Love on tires; love in a regulated,

regimented throng. Love, with its tendernesses—delayed; love, with its expectations—deferred; love, with its desired goal—still unachieved. Evelyn took in the common situation and put it all into the simple language of the highway.

"Too many people. Too many cars. Too much smell—my head begins to ache. Can't we find a quieter road somewhere?"

Ah, the "quieter road"! It helps a young man, when once removed from the hurly-burly of the highway, to relax vigilance; to catch expressions and intonations that otherwise might pass unregarded; and to clarify, with the help of another, his own modest mind.

A rough country road—or track. Green groves at intervals, and orchards in bloom. Some dishevelled old farmhouses, with infrequent battered cars arriving or leaving, or oftener static in the midst of haystacks and resting cattle. No smell of gas beneath the spring's shifting clouds; no distracted or imperious policemen to direct our slight volume of traffic. Often, long stretches of empty road ahead. It was on one of these that Evelyn, not drowsy as on last autumn's excursion, laid her head upon the nearest shoulder, and the shoulder added the arm that had been passive before.

Such actions may mean little, of course, in some circles of society, and mean much, or everything, in others. Embert and Evelyn returned to town an engaged couple, to the sudden relief and surprise of both.

H'm! h'm! Cora would not make the worst sister-in-law in the world, though she still had many things to compass. And George might do better by his finger-nails, though much could be overlooked in such a seething repository of energy. In due time there would be, briefly, the father, who was unlikely to show himself anything but unpretentiously rustic; and the mother, who, even though a semi-invalid, might come on in a spirited yet mistaken attempt to out-city the city. And Embert himself, dear fellow! Perhaps only, as yet, the "average young man" whom she and Otho Janes had considered together, but on the right and promising track; so, who knew, who knew . . . ?

Catherine Trent showed herself reasonably satisfied. Anastasia McIntyre showed herself reasonably satisfied. Catherine was relieved to have Sherrill, after recent disclosures, kept outside of her domestic concerns, and she must try, now, to remove him from her business concerns. She

did not make things too awkward for a coming son-in-law, of all men the most dedicated to awkwardness; and she could take some gratification, at second hand, from Evelyn's own.

"Not, however, that a girl under twenty-two need be in a hurry," she said, forgetting how prompt she had been, but shortly before, to dedicate Evelyn to the single life.

"Certainly not," assented Anastasia. "Still . . ."

"He has had what they call a 'raise,'" remarked Catherine.

"I trust so," replied Anastasia.

To Otho Janes, who called one evening to pass the time of day with old Peter and to check up on the rugged chandeliers and the mahogany wainscotings, Catherine Trent professed herself not only reconciled, but satisfied, and gratified, and—yes, almost out and out happy.

"Well, why not?" asked Janes. "He's a pretty good young fellow, for twenty-four."

Catherine's thoughts turned toward Sherrill.

"I think that, pretty soon, I must come and see you about my affairs."

"I think so, too," agreed Janes. "Don't wait much longer."

XXIX

Evelyn and Claire

Embert, the engaged man, had now less time than ever for the public spaces of the Penrhyn Arms. Let others loiter among its Andalusian columns and its semi-tropical chairs. Let other young men help girls through an occasional game of cards or execute an occasional call. His own time and thoughts went to the florists and the box-offices of theatres and toward the growing approval of old Peter, who had a special bow and smile whenever that fine la-ad came.

As Embert looked into the public reception-room on passing, he was likely to see, more frequently than before, the discreet yet wistful and inquiring face of Claire Basquin. She seemed to have less company than usual, and less certainty of a caller. Perhaps, he thought, the lease had undergone a short renewal at an awkward time; or perhaps its abrupt termination, with succeeding vacancy, was already decreed.

On one occasion, a few days after Embert's decisive drive over the country roads, Claire formally asked him to call. She remembered her own motor-trip in his company.

Embert, according to his Evelyn's just estimate, knew none too much of the actual world and worldly contacts, but he had had spread out before him, many and many a time, the vast, extra-illustrated cyclopædia of life known as the screen.

Dozens of flushed passages had shown him the wiles of the siren—the vamp, to use a current abbreviation. This lovely, persuasive creature lived in luxury amidst tapestries, rugs, highly-wrought grilles, tall vases, and what not. She dressed elaborately in trailing, provocative draperies and in short sleeves or none. She was prone to couches covered with tiger-skins, upon which she would recline seductively; and when her arms and her smile came into play almost any normal young man was expected to succumb. If he failed, he was a soulless clod and no credit—in the eyes of the *assistance*—to the human race. At the least, he held up the action and made everyone impatient. . . .

Well, Embert had no desire to view Claire

Basquin's furnishings or to undergo her possible blandishments. He knew her fibre, and it was not fine enough.

Besides, there was a second point to consider. The other man arrived—inevitably. His coming presently precipitated a *corps à corps* tussle. Those tedious scenes! Chairs and tables upset; curtains torn down; jars and vases hurled; shirts shredded to nothing; hair deplorably deranged. One inclined to rest one's eyes through these strenuous but conventional manœuvres. When one opened them again, another form of tediousness: the villain prostrate in one corner, though not otherwise to be punished; the young hero clung to by an adoring girl who had not lifted a finger to help him; and he, lost to suavity and finish, driven to the necessity of retiring to smooth down his rumpled locks for the next scene . . .

No, Embert had had his dream of struggle and could well spare a repetition in the reality.

He found it very easy, in his modest rapture, to advise Mrs. Basquin that his leisure hours now belonged to another.

"Ah, engaged?" she queried.

"Yes."

"Might one ask—?"

"To Miss Evelyn Trent." Such was his prosaic, categorical reply.

"Ah, after all?" she mused aloud.

Embert attached no exact meaning to her "all." She was left free to think of her abortive attempt at congratulations (until Catherine Trent had crushed her); and he was left free to review the intermittent assiduities of the past months.

Yet it was not long before Claire Basquin crossed his orbit without waiting for him to cross hers. This came about at the instigation—indeed, under the compulsion—of Robert Sherrill. One afternoon she presented herself at the Trent residence and inquired for Evelyn. Peter, who seemed to recall her as having been among the miscellany that had flooded the house shortly before, and who had retained no favourable impression of her, was glad to state that Miss Trent was not at home. Mrs. Trent, then? She was away, as well. Claire, looking through the open door, saw an elderly woman, in a grey pompadour, near the contorted newel-post. She appeared as if dressed for going out too.

"Ah, Mrs.—Mrs.—The lady I met, I believe, at the bazaar." A suggestion to Peter—almost a claim on his attention.

"Yes, Mrs. McIntyre is here," he acknowledged, faced by an incontrovertible fact. "As usual," he almost added.

Anastasia recognized a possible friend of Embert Howell's. Formally accosted, she granted that Evelyn was attending a committee-meeting at one of her clubs. "Not the athletic one, I believe?" she said, referring it to Peter. "The other, then." And the other was named.

Claire's peculiar move had been forced by Sherrill, whom an announced engagement, made with the customary promptitude in print, had infuriated. However near might be the relation between himself and Claire Basquin to its end, he was determined to get some advantage from it before the end was reached. He had professed to believe (and in his inflamed state of mind possibly did believe) that her relations to Howell had been questionable; and he was determined that her confession of them should be made in such a manner as to injure Howell to the utmost.

"It is not true!" she declared vibrantly. "You know it isn't true!" She flushed still redder amidst her red surroundings.

"I know what I am justified in believing. You

made your claim on me. Now make your claim on him."

"And after that?" Was it a moan of hopelessness, or was it a plea for consideration?

"The 'after' will be reached in due season. It can take care of itself."

A mere instrument, then? To be used, and then—who could say?—possibly rejected.

So Claire, after her failure at the home of the Trents, continued on her thorny way to the place where Evelyn Trent was supposed to be spending an active afternoon. If the mortifying thing was to be done, let it be done quickly.

Poor Claire! She was to lose much, in any event, and it was not unlikely that, in the end, after sacrificing much to save something, she might lose all.

Evelyn's committee had just dispersed from its small alcove, and she was alone, or nearly, in the vast general room of the club. Here, at about half-past four, the secretary came searching from her desk to tell her that she had a caller. Evelyn, ready to leave, too, stopped toying with the books on the centre-table and forgot the small exhibition of book-binding (her own specimens included) that had busied her small committee, to hear what the stranger had come for and to listen to

what she had to say. It cannot be said that she recalled one of the several faces which, on that open day of her mother's, may have looked in on her without advancing to sip her tea.

Claire felt the general security of this young girl, who was in the midst of many things that were calculated to uphold her. By contrast, her own insecurity was marked, was almost alarming. She grew tremulous both in voice and body; she began to strike some of the lower notes in the gamut of semi-hysteria; but the more assiduously she applied herself to her distasteful, discreditable task, the less convincing did she become.

Catherine Trent had commented but sparingly on this woman's appropriation of the one man; and now her daughter listened, not too credulously, to the same woman's claim upon the other. She felt herself involved in some unpalatable intrigue, and she should wait as close to silence as might be for the threads to declare themselves.

"I tell you! I tell you!" persisted Claire. Her hands fluttered; her tones fluctuated; almost she might have hypnotized herself for her part.

"Yes?" said Evelyn, with some coldness and much self-control. She was not disconcerted; she was not alarmed. Her intent, frowning eyes showed,

rather, impatience and a shade of disgust. She thought that, by this time, she knew her Embert.

"Ask him! Ask him!" cried Claire, shrilly.

Evelyn glanced across the big room, where two or three delaying women had begun to catch some slightest sense of the unusual. "We are always quiet here," she counselled the other. If, after all, she did not know her Embert, inquiry might proceed through other channels. "Ask him"? Hardly. She was not ready to qualify her pleasant dream, to shadow it, to prejudice it, to destroy it. In her turn, after Embert himself, she should avoid the worst excesses of current drama. She was far from ready to play the shocked and distracted heroine who believed all she was told and who acted impulsively (to disaster) on such beliefs. If Embert, conceivably, had any serious association to establish, either through confession or defence, her mother might listen to what he had to say.

Claire Basquin, whose sole consolation was in the possible incredulity of her hearer, withdrew—to learn what temporary, precarious foothold she might still possess in a tottering world. She went with her handkerchief to her face, and Evelyn, not too censorious, followed with her eyes as the dubious creature moved on to her own peculiar sphere.

XXX

Otho Janes Lends a Hand

"Oh, thank you, thank you; thank you so much!" said Catherine Trent, with irony; and Anastasia McIntyre felt that she might have withdrawn before turning that newel-post into a rostral column, or else have said less alongside it.

"That woman!" continued Catherine, pressing down with her foot an upturned corner of the library rug. "I thought I had swept her out."

The library rug had witnessed, too, the pedal manœuvrings of Embert Howell, whose general innocence had been established—if anything so palpable required establishing; and it was very soon to witness the pedal tramplings of Robert Sherrill—until he was finally urged to trample out.

"Of course not, of course not," Embert had said impatiently. "And she never would have done it by herself. Nor for herself. She cares as little for me as that!" Embert snapped his fingers. "Somebody else is behind it."

Catherine was not slow in agreeing with both these utterances. She felt that not many women in this world would ever care greatly for Embert Howell; perhaps only one, in fact—which, after all, would be an advantage. And she was certain that some propulsive power was behind the wobbling soul who had twice advanced on her in her own fortress.

Sherrill, when he called, was in a different temper. He wanted, more than ever, what seemed to have become more and more inaccessible. It could not be seen that one woman's self-abasement had helped him appreciably toward another. On a previous occasion he had been equivocal in regard to the issue of Catherine Trent from her complex of concerns, financial and domestic, but now he began to show himself hectoring, truculent, threatening. Let Evelyn be his wife, and all should be saved, all should be well. Otherwise . . .

Catherine looked beyond him, as he sat, red and blustering, in his broad chair. "She has been here twice—that Mrs. Basquin. Even if all she says is true, why should you be favoured in a choice?"

Sherrill put his foot down on the rug with a forbidding clump, and told her why. He was older—older than whom, he did not stoop to say; he was

more experienced and more capable; he had a place in the world to hold—and to offer; he was greatly taken by her daughter; he had in him the makings of a good husband—and a better son-in-law . . . A passionate man, with a determination to put through his plan, by whatever means.

Catherine Trent could be cajoled—had been, perhaps, cajoled too long; but she could not be browbeaten. Neither could she believe indefinitely in promises when the means of performance had been placed too freely in the hands of a man whose lack of integrity she could no longer doubt. She dismissed her caller and agent with some access of spirit, allowing him to do his trampling through the public ways; and she determined on an appointment, too long deferred, with Otho Janes.

Old Mr. Janes was found still clinging to his antiquated offices, where he meditated on large things over a shabby desk. He was slow and placid, and far enough along in life to take most matters calmly. In his zone of quiet he welcomed strife. Contention was as much a need for lawyers as sin for priests and disease for doctors. All were a part of the general scheme. The minor affairs of life touched him but lightly. Use was everything. He was now no longer depressed when he returned

to American shores from Europe. He was no longer likely to be as sad at a wedding as at a funeral. He could leave after an evening spent at a settlement house and feel no serious despondency. Even the coming of spring no longer gave him a touch of the blues. And so on. Seasoned and settled, as you see.

"I'm glad you came in," he said to Catherine Trent, rising and motioning her to the least dubious of his chairs. Then, as he re-seated himself, he glanced at a document on his desk.

"You find me in the midst of domestic trouble," he said.

"H'm!" thought Catherine. "A change in housekeepers, or something?"

"My sister's chauffeur—" he continued, and pointed to the document.

"Ha!" thought Catherine, further. "A small matter mixed up with larger ones."

"His name, it seems, is Jan; Jan Krejch—and some more. Well, let it go at Jan."

"What's coming?" wondered Catherine.

"This is a mortgage," pursued Mr. Janes. "And it has matured. Jan Krej—Jan bought it with his savings, and now . . ."

Well, now that it had fallen due, Jan wanted his money back to put into a bungalow, and his

few thousands were not forthcoming. Interest had been paid with some regularity at a sort of mortgage-shop round the corner—here Mr. Janes waved his hand toward the window and the next street—but the main sum itself . . .

"So Jan, after some backing and filling, has finally reached us, here."

"Yes?" queried Catherine.

"Well, my young men in the other room have been looking into the matter, and they say this thing is a forgery. And I incline to agree with them. The property mortgaged seems to be non-existent—or puzzlingly anonymous, so to speak."

"Yes?" said Catherine again.

"This mortgage originated in the office of your agent, Mr. Sherrill—the one he still maintains some doors away; and I suspect that a foul bird—perhaps the first of several—has come home to roost."

Mr. Janes, with a caressing eye, put the paper into a drawer. It would doubtless soon come forth again for other caresses.

"I suppose the authorization you gave was pretty comprehensive?"

"Not so much so as it might have been. And I revoked it some little time back."

"Of course that sort of thing needn't run from everlasting to everlasting."

"It lasted long enough to put me to some disadvantage."

Catherine Trent presently began to see that the game was to be played with all the cards in the pack, and that she herself now held a card of consequence. Sherrill, whether or not a rascal in other directions, must be made to exert enough influence, through whatever pressure, among the partners in this new scheme to bring about a readjustment of her interests and holdings. Let him busy himself with that band of brothers, as a privileged insider, drawing her out of her embarrassments and making restitution of all the funds he had diverted during the year past. Such was her hopeful idea, as she went homeward.

At home she found Evelyn in excitement and tears.

"Mother, mother! Embert is held by the police!"

Catherine Trent, without taking off her things, sat down heavily.

Enough for one day, she thought.

What would that young man get into next? she thought, further.

"He is detained!" cried Evelyn, wildly. "'Detained.' Does that mean 'arrested'?"

"Why 'detained'?" her mother asked shortly.

"He sent word from—from headquarters. He's sold some bonds, and now the interest is unpaid . . ."

Catherine Trent thought of Otho Janes's Jan. He, it seemed, had at least got his interest.

"Well, suppose it is?" she asked, all the same. "I should think that that would be a matter for his firm—unless he has been mixing up in some dubious affair of his own, outside."

"Ho!" said Evelyn, high and mighty, expelling any such wild belief.

She looked at a dead clock. "What time is it?"

"Half-past three."

Evelyn took a start and rushed toward the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going straight to see Mr. Janes. He likes Embert and will do anything for him."

"H'm!" said her mother, ready to make a contribution. "I've just come from there, and have a few things to tell you. Let the poor man have a little time for his corporations."

"What do I care for his corporations?"

"Very well; go along, if you like. Only, in case you should want to hear—"

"You don't think I'm going to stand on the side lines and wring my hands all through it?" cried Evelyn, with spirit. "I'm going to see this thing—whatever it is—through to a finish!"

Catherine Trent recalled, just here, her daughter's notions about "finish" in general. She had declared, from finishing-school days, that she was going on to finish herself; and it was only too evident that she had lately taken up the task of finishing another. Well, well; let her—let them—go ahead. She was beginning to see a way out of her own difficulties, so let them tussle with theirs. It all counted for discipline, for experience.

"Yes," repeated Evelyn, with spunk. "To a finish. And let me tell you, Mrs. William P. Trent, that Embert and I are going to finish together! Who's seen my hat?"

XXXI

Embert Passes through the Mill

A spirited young woman blew suddenly into Otho Janes's offices. It was ten minutes to four, but Mr. Janes had already gone.

"Gone where?" she demanded peremptorily.

The young men did not know. He was out, somewhere, on business not necessarily connected with the office routine.

"Fine girl," said one of them, as she suddenly withdrew.

"Miss Trent," said a second, who followed the society news and studied its pictures, and was not altogether averse to a breeze from a high quarter.

Evelyn, returning home, had a few exasperating hours: futile telephonings, nervous shiftings from room to room, and frequent appeals to her mother to "do something."

At eight, Embert came, and Otho Janes. Shall it be said that Janes brought Embert, or that he accompanied him? A marked measure of good-will and camaraderie between them, in any event.

Embert had mastered a careful dignity and now maintained it without a break. He had passed some hours among a horde of imported minor officials who were no respecters of strangers. Embert was naturally a stranger in such circles and had been treated unceremoniously for a while—like a fowl suddenly hustled into a coop and then as carelessly released. His plumage had been ruffled, but he did not mean to squawk unduly.

The question was, who had brought about this thing, and how, and why? In some cases one can know; in others, can only surmise.

The members of Embert's firm had been the first to protest. Granting anything wrong at all, the case was, in its nature, civil, not criminal. How about the credit of a reputable house? The quiet member of the firm had been indignant, and the grouchy member had become violent beyond measure. As Embert now explained, carefully, to Catherine Trent, who was eying him severely, it was all simply a matter of recasting the affairs of that terminal railway in Texas. New ownership and a reorganization all round had delayed interest payments for a few months. But the house was behind it all, and had even taken a large share of

the expense of re-adjustment. Everything would soon be all right—before the next interest-day.

"Suppose that I, personally, *did* sell some of their bonds?" he submitted to the little party with patient dignity.

One consolation: the "house" had risen for him. He might have been thought its favourite child. Perhaps even the shadow of future partnership rested upon him.

Who was to blame for the affront that he had suffered? Sherrill, it was concluded. The preposterous charge could hold no longer than to put a possible stigma on its victim.

Rather laboriously, with help drawn from some certainties and from some probabilities, the puzzling skein was unravelled. One of Sherrill's associates must have held a bond or two issued by this Southern company and have allowed the use of it for Sherrill's own miserable purposes. But who, among the wretched ruck of the police department and of the lesser courts, could have lent himself to the technique of the scheme? Embert's own thought went out to the companions of Sherrill whom he had encountered on a probable tour of the dance-halls and afterward noticed at his club on the evening when boxing had been

offered the ladies: the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern breed, those "indifferent children of the earth."

"The cousins of bailiffs, the brothers-in-law of police lieutenants," said Mr. Janes, calmly. "Often a dirty little lot, doing dirty little tricks behind dirty little screens." For the moment there seemed to be a decided shadow on the marble brow of Justice. Yet Justice, as he must acknowledge, had been smirched many times before. Yes, many times.

"A very clever, resourceful young man, with some knowledge of the ropes," he said impartially. "The only pity is, it should be a mere ephemeral piece of spite-work. I see nothing more."

Evelyn stared at this cool view. "It's outrageous!" she cried, with the countenance (after a look across the room) of her mother. "If Mr. Sherrill has done this, I want him arrested and put in jail at once!"

"Not at once," said Mr. Janes, dreamily. "Not at once."

"Why not?"

"There are other matters to come before that. We must consider your mother, too."

"Why, yes," Evelyn acknowledged. Her mother

had partly filled in the trying hours by stating the results of her own visit to their friend's office.

"'Jail,'" said Mr. Janes, now almost in a trance, and speaking in a low, faint voice, "is doubtless awaiting him. But let us avail ourselves of a margin of time to set some other things right, meanwhile. Let other folk come forward, as they doubtless will, before long, and attend to that part of the undertaking."

He sank still lower in his big chair and closed his eyes.

"I remember," he continued, the case of Jacob—Jacob—just what was his name? Yes, the case of Jacob Van Tassel—that was it. He forged mortgages, too, and went to state's prison. He may be there, yet," Mr. Janes went on, putting a little cheer into his drab vision.

Presently he opened one eye on Embert. "Of course he was at once expelled from his club, and one of the younger and newer members was the first to bring the charge that turned him out."

Embert straightened in his place. Here was an opportunity at last to pay that fellow up.

Evelyn, meanwhile, studied the situation. "So you will use this knowledge of his crookedness to

force him to get us out of all the things he has got us into?"

Her mother, too, looked expectant, though she had already decided that this was the course the affair was to take.

Mr. Janes came a little farther out of his dream.

"H'm!" he said. "Let me consider. Here I am, a venerable old man—"

"A venerable old dear!" interpolated Evelyn.

"—and a reputable member of my profession, young lady, and a figure of a certain consequence in society. All in all, I shouldn't enjoy being remarked as having almost compounded a felony."

"Is that anything so very dreadful?"

"Dreadful, sometimes, if detected. I shouldn't care, everything considered, to be detected. Nor any of my young men. Perhaps, however, I might find a young man of force and ability and ambition who would summon your friend, Mr. S., to some big, impressive, over-caparisoned office in such positive terms that he would not dare hold back. He would then"—to Catherine Trent—"be driven to such exertions among his own associates as would bring you through without any great harm and loss; and then the certain successors of Jan Kr—well, of Jan—who will happen

along soon, are sure to do the rest. Until then,"—with a glance at Embert—"you must let your man enjoy, if he can, the amenities of your club."

Catherine Trent gave a sigh of relief. This programme seemed almost a restatement of the one she had shaped in her mind on her way home. In capable, friendly hands it ought to go through.

Accompanied by Mr. Janes, she presently had the grace to go to another room, where their trying talk might develop greater detail; and Evelyn and Embert were left together.

Evelyn did not inquire about her fiancé's experiences through the day. There might indeed be a smirch on the brow of Justice, but she preferred to print no stain on the fair face of their love. Embert, safely back in a harbour of refuge, silently wondered how things might go, on occasion, with the humble, the friendless, the unchampioned. Even now he had no name and place that would help him withstand, unaided, the slopping tides of a turbid urban democracy that seemed more and more to threaten everybody except the very rich and the compactly organized. Well, well; it was all a little more "experience," a little more preparation for days to come. Then,

too, he was on his way to a place of his own. He, too, had gained friends and associates . . .

Yes, Embert, on the sofa, had become soberly intent on the future; the past, the immediate past, he was willing to set aside. But surely his future did not deserve a frown. He frowned, nevertheless—the frown that goes with a brown study.

Evelyn studied his face. "I am here," she said, crossing over to him.

"Why, so you are," he replied.

And there was room on the sofa for two.

XXXII

The Pool Once More

Months pass—in life, as on the screen. The dawn comes, too. The particular moment of the dawn to which we now lift our thankful eyes turns out to be a late afternoon in August. Again we are in the country—or a handsome suburban version of it. Again a pool; again hedges and clumps of shrubbery, and a veranda.

The day is bright. The day is warm. The day, after hours of unclouded sun, is even hot. We shall find in the pool those who never have been in the pool before. And a "gallery," small but sufficing, may be noted in the shade of the veranda.

Anastasia McIntyre, fanning herself with the latest issue of a fashion sheet, is happy. All is now well with the universe. Her central sun is again established in its accustomed and grateful place, and the petty annoyances and restrictions from which Anastasia has suffered during the past few months are well behind her. It is as if an

incursion of meteorites or asteroids had swept past for a brief, embarrassing hour and had slightly dislocated the system of which she had been a humble part; but now she is back in her accustomed orbit and functioning in her accustomed way.

Catherine Trent is, of course, the central sun. The clouds that lately obscured her have been swept aside and she sits near Anastasia in regained regal composure. She has been drawn from out her major difficulties with no great loss. There is even a prospect that what was the greatest burden of all, her antiquated home, may be taken off her hands by venturesome strangers and put at last to profitable use.

"Anyhow, they've looked us over," she says to Anastasia. "The poor place will probably be only a pile of valueless bricks, before long; but they certainly do recognize the value of the ground."

"How could they fail to?" asks loyal Anastasia.

The pool is far from crowded; only a quartette of young people. No poetical invasion such as took place the year before. We have little Bessie Corwin, now almost old enough to count, who splashes about with long-accustomed familiarity. We have Jack Milburn, who patrols the edge of the pool with his proper assurance. Finally, we

have Embert Howell and Evelyn Trent, who will now prove, mutually, the advantages of physical culture; he having profited by his gymnasium, with its "professor," and she having been advantaged by pulleys, dumb-bells and hikes. Each is prepared to demonstrate to the little circle round them, as well as to the other, the eugenic suitability of the pairing-about-to-be.

If Embert inclines to view shyly the newer perfections of his fiancée, Evelyn, by some feminine miracle that is often brought into play, continues to remain unconscious of them, or to seem so. But she is conscious enough of the improved Embert, who, if still slender, has developed his lines of grace. That impudent fellow of last year! She glances sidewise at Embert again: Hyperion, after a satyr.

If her thoughts now tend to stray from the man who is to be her husband in October, let us bear with her as she looks forward to the ceremony that is to make him such. A church wedding, probably; for who knows that October, when it comes, will have left them a home? The old familiar double parlours stripped and demolished; crystal chandeliers and Fragonard-like panels in some new hotel replacing the cumber-

some, old-time grandeurs, for the reception. A hired head-waiter (whom, however, she may often have met) to serve in old Peter's place . . .

Then the bridesmaids. Shall she ask Clementine Langworthy on to act as maid of honour? But Clementine is rather far away, and is a dull, unrewarding girl, at that. How, then, about a matron of honour? Our new little sister-in-law must be inducted, sooner or later, into the life social; so why not start her out? As for George, the rugged and precipitate, she does not quite see him as his brother's best man; but that will be for Embert himself to determine. Finally, the other members of his family. She hopes that his parents, yet unseen and not much heard of, will be pleasantly and unpretentiously the home-town sort with no disposition to attempt the metropolitan. . . .

"Come, dive in," calls Embert from the pool's centre; and Evelyn, at the deep end, drops her deep thoughts and dives.

After the bathers had dressed and had joined Mrs. Corwin and her other guests on the veranda, they found that Otho Janes, sauntering down the road from his own place, had arrived. An avuncular compliment in his eyes for Evelyn, and a cordial handshake for Embert. Then Anastasia McIntyre,

who could sometimes say the wrong thing at the wrong time, inquired of him about the proceedings against Robert Sherrill.

"Going on very well," he replied, sinking into a wicker chair and casting about for a fan. "Changes of venue, bills of exceptions, and all the other features in good and regular order."

Otho Janes, as a lawyer, had no fondness for speed and short cuts. He seemed related to the priest who does not demand too sudden a conversion, but will allow the poor penitent time to struggle for a while with his conscience; or like the physician who does not insist on too sudden a cure.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Janes, genially, "let there be all the publicity and expense possible, and a gradual approach to the stern portal. It yawns for him"—here he allowed the story-writer to supplant the lawyer—"and will get him, just the same."

"I trust so!" said Evelyn, vindictively.

Mr. Janes glanced humorously in the direction of Embert.

"Meanwhile, he is free to walk past the doors and windows of your club, even if no longer free to enter."

Embert set his face sternly and made no verbal reply.

"And the house, the dear old house?" asked Janes, turning to Catherine Trent.

"The dear old house," she replied with some asperity, "is costing in taxes about twice what it ought. That printing corporation is looking, and they talk of foundations in before cold weather. I shall hear next week. Do you know of some good apartment for us?"

Otho Janes waved a hand city-ward to indicate multitudinous building operations. Almost everyone else had some suggestion to make. Milburn's uncle was putting up something in twenty-five storeys. The hotel reception began to fade; but that would mean more to do within the next few months, rather than less.

"And that woman who came twice to the house?" inquired Anastasia, still inspired to think of the wrong things and to blurt them out.

Embert looked in one direction, and Evelyn looked in another—he toward the tips of his toes, and she toward the far horizon.

Anastasia seemed to be taxing her Catherine with the response. But nobody responded at all; nobody could. Who was there to tell whether

Claire Basquin now lived surrounded by red walls, or by blue, or by grey? Who could say whether one cavalier or another was now interesting himself in her, or whether, as the Clara Stiles of an earlier day, she might not have reversed the general direction of travel and have returned to her patient small-town relatives?

Everybody, in trepidation, hoped that Anastasia would not distinguish herself for a third time. Once, she seemed on the point of asking why George Howell had carried off Cora Graves so suddenly and had thus added new relatives to a family in which she felt herself so deeply concerned—not to say involved; but the combined efforts of Evelyn and Embert stopped her. So she lay back, fluttering her fashion magazine, and trying to convey the impression that she was fully satisfied.

Well, the end draws near. By all the conventions of the game the subordinate figures should now contrive to efface themselves and leave to the hero and heroine the predestined clinch and fade-out. The hostess might have been called inside by household cares—perhaps some domestic consultation that would have carried along

Catherine Trent and her undetachable Anastasia. Jack Milburn might have found Bessie Corwin adult enough for a saunter through the shrubbery, with attentive words suited to the occasion. Otho Janes might well have ambled back to his coming salvias and chrysanthemums. Instead of which—

Instead of which a super-serviceable maid brought out tea; and two or three neighbours who overlooked the hedge came across the lawn by a short cut; and, to end with, the master of the place made his twenty miles from town, and Embert, after having missed him in his opera-box, now met him in his own grounds.

No, whatever the silver sheet may tell us, two young people, even after trials and vexations, do not live to themselves alone. We are social creatures, and we are destined (or doomed, as it may seem on certain occasions) to the social life. We meet the agreeables of our race, and we encounter the disagreeables—it is all in the warp and woof. Embert Howell, instructed and disciplined by recent events, helped distribute the teacups and the scones; and Evelyn Trent, after much taxing endeavour to make her goal, temperately accepted, along with the rest of the company; and there was nothing in his manner,

or in hers, to denote a close relationship that was soon to become closer still.

"You'd never suppose they were engaged!" whispered Anastasia to her Catherine.

"Thank heaven for that!" Catherine replied. "They both understand how to behave. I only wish more young folks were like them."

THE CHEVALIER OF PENSIERI-VANI
(Under the pseudonym *Stanton Page.*)*
Boston: J. G. Cupples, 1890

THE CHATELAINE OF LA TRINITÉ
New York: The Century Company, 1892

THE CLIFF DWELLERS
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893

WITH THE PROCESSION
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1895

THE PUPPET BOOTH
New York: The Century Company, 1896

FROM THE OTHER SIDE
Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Company, 1898

THE LAST REFUGE
Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Company, 1900

UNDER THE SKYLIGHTS
New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1901

WALDO TRENCH AND OTHERS
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908

LINES LONG AND SHORT
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917

ON THE STAIRS
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918

BERTRAM COPE'S YEAR
Chicago: R. F. Seymour, 1919

GARDENS OF THIS WORLD
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1929

NOT ON THE SCREEN
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930

*So published only in the first edition. Later reprinted (1892) by The Century Company, under Mr. Fuller's name.

Henry Blake Fuller died on July 28, 1929, shortly after he had finished this, his last book. It seems almost foregone that he will take his place among those many artists to whom recognition comes too late. The man who wrote such miniature masterpieces as *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani* and *The Last Refuge* (which Carl Van Vechten has called a forerunner of *South Wind*) is unknown to the world at large. Only a few discerning critics are aware that from his pen came an unparalleled series of novels about Chicago; that this quiet man was possessed of one of the finest talents that America has known. Any fame that might come now will needfully be tinged with the ironic and that in itself should please his delicate, sardonic spirit.

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